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News. Clues. Kingdom views.

CHRISTIAN COURIER

Theme issue: Sports

GUIDE TO EURO 2012

Joel Aalbers

Maybe you've noticed something unusual in your CRC church lately: a few kids, and perhaps even the odd adult, showing up for Sunday morning worship wearing the bright orange jersey of the Netherlands national football team (or soccer for us North Americans). If you've witnessed this phenomenon, as I have in my church, it's because the European Championship football tournament – known as Euro 2012 – takes place this month. Once again enthusiastic Europeans will be filling their local pubs and city squares to support their national teams, and fans with European ancestry in Canada and around the world will gather together to "cheer so loud they can hear you back home" (to quote a Carlsberg advertising campaign from Euro 2004).

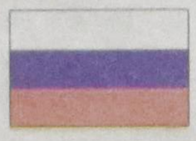
Attackers like Arjen Robben will be the key to Dutch success.

You could make a compelling argument that if somehow Brazil and Argentina could be entered into this tournament, it would be a superior competition to the World Cup. In fact, many commentators believe that the Euro Cup is more difficult to win. Qualifying teams have been split into four groups of four teams, and a round robin will be played in each group with the top two teams advancing to the single game knockout quarterfinals. Winning teams will advance to the semi-finals and then final, and the ultimate winner will be crowned European champion.

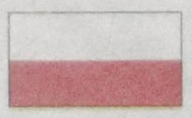
What follows is a brief introduction to each team's outlook, prospects, and key players. So, without further ado, here are the teams of EURO 2012.

Joel Aalbers is a dedicated soccer player and, according to the CC interim editor's two-year-old son, is a fringe member of the Dutch national squad. He lives in London, Ont. and is a member of First CRC.

Group A



Russia – Perhaps one of the biggest cheers during the ceremony for the drawing of the Euro 2012 groups came from the Russian contingency when they realized they had been selected for Group A. By far one of the weakest groups, the Russian team will only have itself to blame if it doesn't advance out of the group stage. Led by striker Andrei Arshavin, Dutch coach Dick Advocaat has assembled a team largely composed of players from the top teams in the ever-improving and oil-rich Russian league. Look for them to top the group.

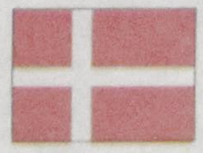


Poland – Making only its second appearance in the tournament, Poland received an automatic qualification for the tournament as co-host. Their roster lacks a superstar player, meaning that their biggest advantage will be the vocal support of the home crowd. However, the crowd can't score a goal or make a save, so Poland could be seeing their tournament end after the group stage.

Czech Republic – With many of their key players from previous tournaments retired, the Czech Republic's team is largely made of role players from European club teams. However, they do have goalkeeper Petr Cech (not "Czech"), who stood on his head during Chelsea's recent win in the Champions League final. Considering the low scoring nature of soccer, an in-form keeper can turn a 2-1 loss into a 1-0 win.

Greece – After a fairy tale run in 2004 which saw them win the trophy, Greece has returned to soccer reality (a strikingly similar fate is currently happening to their economy). Like Poland, Greece lacks any big name stars. Unfortunately, they will not have the support of the locals and will likely find themselves on the outside looking in after the group stage, unless they can somehow channel the spirit of 2004.

Group B



Denmark – If Denmark was in Group A, they would have a great chance of advancing to the quarterfinals. However, their reward for winning their qualification group was to be drawn into the "Group of Death," the informal moniker given to the most difficult group in each tournament. As a result, they will likely have to fight for every single point, which will not come easy.

The Netherlands – Runners up at the last World Cup, The Netherlands features a who's who of international soccer with players like Sneijder, Robben, VanPersie and Huntelaar. Beside the challenge of trying to fit all of their offensive players in a functional formation, the Dutch's biggest weakness is their defense, which lacks a blue chip player. However, if you can score two or three goals a game, it may not matter. The Dutch also have a history of self-destructing, a trait they will need to avoid should they hope to progress far in this tournament.

Germany – Along with the Dutch and Spaniards, the Germans are one of the favourites, as they won all of their games in the qualification process. With midfielders Bastian Schweinsteiger and Mesut Ozil, the Germans can control the centre of the field. The team also has a great keeper in Neuer and more options at striker than you can shake a stick at. Look for the Germans and the Dutch to battle for the top of the group, a familiar rivalry given that the two nations have decades of bad blood between them (both historical and soccer related).

Portugal – The Portuguese were left shaking their heads when they were drawn into this group. Led by Manchester United's Nani, perennial world player of the year candidate Christiano Ronaldo, and defender Pepe, the Portuguese will have to beat Denmark and then hope for some luck against the Dutch and Germans to advance. Television screens have broadcast the tears of Ronaldo following his team's elimination after every tournament he has played in, and the tears could be flowing early this year following the group stage.

See **Groups C and D** *on page 2*

News

How do we do *Citius, Altius, Fortius* for God?

John Byl

Citius, Altius, Fortius is the Latin Olympic motto and means "Faster, Higher, Stronger." As we await the upcoming Summer Olympics we eagerly anticipate faster times, greater heights and increased demonstrations of strength. But should we? Mottos have culturally and historically formed roots that are based on certain views of life and people. Is this Olympic motto one we can share in as Christians?

In answering this question it is important to consider the structure of play, game, sport and athletics. You see, sometimes people think Christians ought to play but not compete. On the other hand, some people are more inclined to compete than play. While some see tension between these two structures, my argument is that both the structure of play and the structure of sport can be directed in ways that bring God honour or dishonour. But let's define what we are talking about.

First of all, a game is a voluntary agreement to overcome unnecessary obstacles. For example, in a 200 metre race runners must stay in their lanes as they round the corner, and can certainly not take a short-cut across the infield. Or in a game of baseball we limit a batter to three strikes and four balls and define what is considered a strike and a ball. There is nothing absolute about any of these rules; they just define the structure of baseball. Sometimes, in our push for higher, faster, stronger, the agreed to ethos of competing within the confines of these unnecessary obstacles is modified by some individuals and the game is not competed fairly. When people take drugs or otherwise cheat, they are no longer testing the human possibilities within a game, but the possibilities within a game by altered humans or by devious changes of the rules to improve their chance at succeeding. This is more about succeeding than competing within the confines of the agreed to challenge, the agreed to game.

For me these games can be played or competed. A frolicsome game is one in which we overcome unnecessary obstacles with a greater focus on play and fooling around than anything else. When I have a race with my one-year-old granddaughter I am more interested in frolicsome play than in competing. When I run a long distance race, however, I am more interesting in getting the best time I can than in fooling around – for most of these longer runs I have trained for four months, so I am not fooling around on race day (even though the only person I am competing with is myself). There are those who are trying to win certain categories for awards and prize monies, and for them it is a highly competitive game.

These different levels of competing in a game are also evident in other areas of life. Take music, for instance: someone might just be fooling around with music by playing some random songs, or one might devote much practice with the assistance of coaches to deliver a high level concert piece. Both these structures – play and high level competition – open creation potential for pleasing or displeasing God.

During the 1964 Innsbruck Olympics Italian bobsledder Eugenio Monti gave a bolt from his sleigh so that Tony Nash and his British team could compete, an act of kindness and good sportsmanship that enabled Nash to win the gold medal.

One researcher noted that there were more smiles on athletes' faces at a selected Inuit Games than there were in a certain Olympic Games. But this suggests that play, with its accompanying smiles, is better than intense, competitive engagement with a game (which tends to produce few smiles). This argument misses the mark. It would be like arguing that a person smiling while playing some random and fun piano pieces is doing something better than one who is performing a world class piano concert in which the pianist smiles very little.

The danger of conformity

Play, game and high level athletics can be used to delight in and express praise to God. But how do we do high level athletics without "conforming to the world" (Romans 12:2)?

I think part of the answer is competing fairly. I believe fair play is about enhancing the other competitor's experience. Philippians 2:3-4 encourages us to think of the interests of others. One way to do that is to push them hard. James 1:14 speaks of iron sharpening iron, and high level athletics can do that. It is also about appreciating limitations, genetic giftedness, skilled coaching, healing therapists and imaginative strategists. Respecting the game structure as well as the agreed to ethos. It is about respecting teammates, officials and opponents.

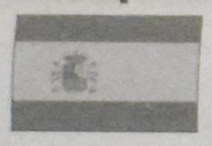
Permit one example of fair play, as sports blogger Alsy puts it in an online article on the subject: "The 1964 winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria offers another perfect example of classic sportsmanship. The British two-man bobsled team, led by Tony Nash, completed its first run placing second overall. Then Nash discovered a broken bolt on the sled putting them out of the competition. At the bottom of the hill, the great Italian bobsled driver Eugenio Monti, (who was lying in first place), heard of their plight and without hesitation, removed the bolt from his own sled sending it to the British team at the top of the hill. Nash's team fixed their sled and clinched gold. Monti took the bronze and later commented, 'Tony Nash did not win because I gave him a bolt. Tony Nash won because he was the best driver.'" Monti competed as best as he could, but was not going to allow a broken bolt to jeopardize the opportunity to compete over a close rival.

I think another part of competing fairly is to respect limitations. It is important to appreciate this enough to not take drugs, use genetic engineering or otherwise gain advantages. Even the use of expensive technologies for swimsuits or other technologies can be unfair to poorer nations. For Olympic and Sport Organizations, clearly specifying the nature of the game obstacles to overcome can deal with these issues to equalize the competitive field.

Finally, Colossians 3:23-24 reminds us to do everything for God. It is easy for us to idolize and worship people, but God is the only one who deserves our worship. When you think of the amazing physical abilities God has created, do

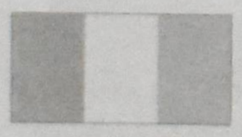
See ***Citius, Altius, Fortius*** *on page 3*

Group C

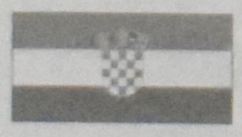


Spain – The current World Cup holders, Spain is one of the favourites to win Euro 2012. With Iniesta, Xavi, Xabi Alonso and Fabregas, Spain has one of the best midfields in Europe to go along with their top flight defending and goalkeeping. However, with strikers David Villa injured and Fernando Torres losing his scoring touch, Spain will be looking for some new blood to bury some goals.

Italy – Once a constant threat for every major tournament, the Italians fizzled at the last World Cup leading to an overhaul of their roster. Known for their stingy defence, the Italians only allowed two goals during the entire qualification process, though their competition at EURO 2012 will be significantly better. The big question mark for the team is Mario Balotelli, who will score a brilliant goal one minute and then get ejected the next. Perhaps it may be best to leave him on the bench.

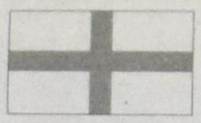


Ireland – For a number of Irish players, this may be the last kick at the can. Players like Robbie Keane and Damien Duff, long time stalwarts of the Irish national team, may be entering the last tournament in which they can have an impact. However, with Italy and Spain in the group, it will be a tough climb to get beyond pool play.

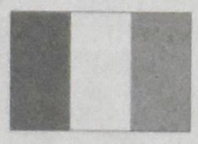


Croatia – Always the dark horse, the team with the checkered jerseys rolls into EURO 2012 after dispatching Turkey in a qualification playoff. However, in order to overcome Spain and Italy they will have to play flawless soccer and have a little luck. Luka Modric is the player to watch on this team.

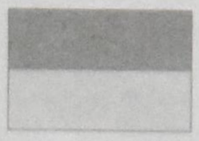
Group D



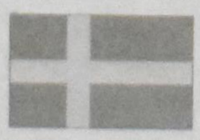
England – Every year the English are christened as favourites by the English media and almost every year they crash out early. Whether this is because they are constant underachievers or are vastly overrated is an argument that soccer fans have been engaged in for years. With the manager who guided the team through qualification quitting just before the tournament, players being investigated for using racial slurs during games, and top forward Wayne Rooney being suspended for the first two matches, the possibility of another disaster has dramatically increased.



France – One of the most talented teams in Europe, the French team is currently famous for a players revolt that occurred during the most recent World Cup. After suspending the ringleaders, the French association is trying to get the focus back on playing the game. With players like Benzema, Ribery, Nasri, and Evra, France should advance to the quarterfinals.



Ukraine – The other co-host of Euro 2012, Ukraine was also granted automatic qualification, and much like Poland, will most likely not advance out of the group phase. Ukraine's most recognizable name is Andriy Schevchenko, who unfortunately is most famous for being one of the biggest flops in English premier league history. Hopefully they give the home crowd something to cheer about, but don't expect too much.



Sweden – Sweden will go as far as Zlatan Ibrahimovic can carry them. One of the most consistent strikers in Europe, he will lead a team that finished second to Holland in the group stage and received automatic qualification as the best second place team. However, in order to reach the quarterfinals they will have to leapfrog either France or England, which may be a tall task.

News

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

A virtuous circle

On a recent vacation in Belize, we stayed near the town of Armenia. There isn't much to see in Armenia – it's very small, with a few brightly coloured houses. There's no town square and no public buildings. Instead, the focal point of the town is the elementary school soccer field.

Every day, almost as soon as the sun rises, local children are out playing soccer on the pitch. At noon, they're out again. And they're playing again after school, too, until past sundown. One of the residents told me that if the local competitive men's soccer team wants to practice, they first have to shoo the children off the field.

One of the local kids, a six-year-old by the name of Alessandro, became buddies with my son, Cameron. Alessandro asked Cameron if he played soccer, and my son said: "Yes – about once a week in the summer." Alessandro's eyes widened: "Once a week? I'd DIE if I only played once a week." Cameron replied: "Well, it's different with hockey. That's more our sport. Kids play that all the time."

And that's when it hit me: despite all the kids playing organized soccer all across Canada every summer, we've only qualified for the World Cup once, until very recently, had a viable professional soccer league. Why?

Because Canadian kids don't play soccer for fun.

They play hockey for fun. And that's why it's our sport. Think about it: as soon as the ponds and outdoor rinks are frozen, kids are on the ice. Between kids' games and adult recreational hockey, it's nearly impossible to book an hour of ice time in the winter, in many communities. And when the weather turns warm, kids play hockey in driveways and on roads.

As I write this article, I'm looking out over a group of soccer fields and a baseball diamond. Groups of smaller kids, including my son, are conducting a weekly practice on two of the three soccer fields. The third field and the baseball diamond are empty.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell describes what he calls the "10,000 hour rule." Gladwell says that to get really good at a task, you've got to spend a minimum of 10,000 hours doing it. That rule applies to everything: writing, painting, mastering a musical instrument and playing sports.

Of course, you can't achieve the 10,000 hours you need to master a skill by only doing it once a week for an hour. So, if Gladwell is right, my son and the children playing soccer with him right now are not going to become very good soccer players. Not the way they're being trained now, anyway.

On the other hand, if they were really passionate about soccer and played it in their free time, that would be different. But they don't. Soccer is something most kids play, but give up as soon as their parents stop signing them up.

Playing hockey on the pond is a joyous winter ritual for many Canadians, both young and old.

The numbers

The numbers speak for themselves: in 2005, 1.3 million Canadian adults played recreational hockey versus only about 500,000 who played soccer – despite the fact that hockey is a far more expensive game to play once you calculate equipment and ice rental costs. But among kids it's the reverse. In 2005, 44 percent of all children from age 5-14 played soccer. So why do kids abandon soccer in adulthood?

Maybe it comes down to joy.

After all, people want to play sports that bring them joy, and because they play them, they get more joy out of them, so they play them more. It's a virtuous circle. Maybe the way we teach kids to play soccer sucks the joy out of the game. Or maybe they don't learn to love it because they only play it once a week.

I think that applies to most things in life, including faith. If my only meaningful faith experience during the week is a church service, I'm probably not really enjoying – or practicing – my faith very much. Weekly church attendance doesn't make me a professing and practicing Christian any more than practicing soccer for an hour a week makes me a soccer player.

On the other hand, if I'm enjoying my faith, I will want to practice it at every opportunity. I'll get a kick out of how it changes my life, my outlook, and my relationships with others.

And because I'm practicing it more, I'll get "better" at it too. Faith will become more natural and more central to my life. I might find myself reading about it more – just for fun – and talking about it with people. Which makes me wonder about young adults who abandon church.

Is it possible that kids leave church because even though they were forced to attend services once a week, they were never taught how to live lives of service and joy during the rest of the week? Is it possible that well-meaning programs like catechism class are the spiritual equivalent of wind sprints: good for you, but dreadful to endure?

Again, what if it comes down to joy? Maybe a faith learned in the home that is alive, and joyful, and practiced throughout the week is what will turn a kid into a full-fledged member of God's team. If faith brings joy then it will be practiced more, bringing more joy, and deepening that faith even further.

So imagine, just for a moment, what would happen if we all applied the 10,000 hour rule to our faith? I imagine it would be like that school soccer field in Belize. I imagine adults showing up on Sunday morning shocked and thrilled to find a church already packed with joyful young people, scooting aside to make room.

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Citius, Altius, Fortius *continued*

we worship the one who uses them or the one who made them? As much as we worship God, it is also appropriate to applaud the fine efforts skilled athletes display as they master their particular sport. The athlete can also feel satisfied in their accomplishments, but recognize that none of these accomplishments would be possible were it not for their creative and amazing Father. One might have different opinions of Tim Tebow's celebrating to God each touchdown his team scores, but acknowledging God more in our lives is something to be exemplified.

A few notes of caution are necessary regarding the Olympic motto. Though it is neat to celebrate humans being faster, higher, stronger, this needs to be balanced by the needs of the world. This balance should occur in the same way that a world class pianist needs to balance her practice time with the needs of the world.

One other point worth considering is that speed, height and strength is a motto that suits men better than women. Sure, we can measure the fastest, highest and strongest females, but these numbers will almost always be below those of the fastest, highest and strongest males. The Olympic motto reinforces sports made by males for males. More gender-equitable cultures like the Netherlands have adopted more co-educational sports like Korfball. In Canada we have not gone that way yet. In the Olympics they have not gone that way yet. As fast, as high and as strong as elite women are, we need to find ways, and mottos that also reflect female characteristics and co-ed sporting experiences. Sport need not be something that primarily allows men to shine.

Citius, Altius, Fortius. To those who have athletic gifts, develop them, balance your practice time with the needs of a hurting world, compete fairly, appreciate human limitations and be thankful to God. To those who watch these athletes, let us develop our own gifts, balance our time with the needs of a hurting world, enjoy fair competition, appreciate human limitations and express thankfulness to God. Let the games begin.

John Byl, PhD, is the president of CIRA Ontario (since 2003) and a professor of Physical Education at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont. Dr. Byl has authored or coauthored 20 books, including Christian Paths to Health and Wellness.

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Editorials

Tebowmania

Paul Buma

Many Christian athletes are open about their faith, but one of the most famous of these in recent years has been Tim Tebow. Tebow is a National Football League quarterback who played his first two seasons for the Denver Broncos and has recently been traded to the New York Jets. He has become known for his now famous one knee down, elbow on knee, head bowed in prayer pose at various points in football games.

This very public expression of faith has resulted in many reactions by football fans and an extensive array of media analysis, which some commentators have taken to calling "Tebowmania." Some of Tebow's fans have taken to "tebowing" – emulating the pose he assumes – because they share similar convictions and as a gesture of respect or support for his courage, while others do so to mock the faith he exhibits.

Whether made fun of or taken seriously, there is money in "Tebowmania." It wouldn't be unreasonable to suggest that Tebow was acquired by the New York Jets as much for his marketability as for his eye-catching, unorthodox success as a football player. Tebow hype will no doubt generate ticket sales and newspaper headlines, and there has already been a battle between Nike and Reebok over the right to use Tebow's name on football-related products. And all this was triggered by open displays of Christian faith on the playing field.

What are we to make of this seemingly genuine but very public expression of faith between a man and his God? Christians have responded to such demonstrations of faith in various ways. Some say we are called in Matthew 5:16 to let our light shine so that all may see the glory of God through us. Others point out that we are encouraged not to make a public exhibition of our faith, but to pray in private. People of this opinion think that Tebow is like the Pharisees, praying on a football field to gain attention and fuel the phenomenon of Tebowmania. In this light, "tebowing" is seen as a violation of Jesus' admonition in Mathew 6:5: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full."

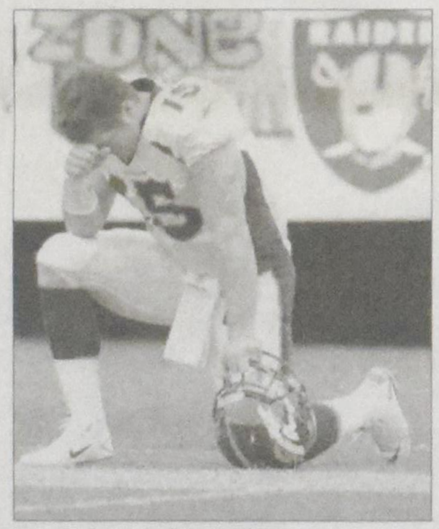
But is there a difference between Tebow's on-field prayers and those of the Pharisees? When I read about Tim Tebow or listen to him talk, I get the distinct impression that there is no desire on his part to be publicly recognized for his piety. The question here is what really motivates Tim Tebow to pray in public the way that he does? And the answer, it seems, is that Tebow prays to a God whom he loves and who is his Lord and Saviour.

Tebow consistently gives credit to God. Granted, how Tebow lives out his faith past his very public "tebowing" on football fields is for the most part unknown to me. But it appears that Tebow lives an exemplary life, serving as a role model for the young and engaging people in relationships in which he effectively bears witness to the gospel. The Tim Tebow Foundation helps impoverished people in the Philippines as well as in the U.S. "Tebowing" may well be the tip of the iceberg of Tim Tebow's faith, a very public expression of a private relationship between a man and his God. To me it smacks of passion, a man unafraid and unashamed, genuine and uncompromising about his faith. How can I not set my critical tendencies aside and admire and support him?

What does Tebow pray for?

What does Tebow pray for when he prays? People have speculated that his prayers are about winning football games. They assume that his significant success as quarterback of the Denver Broncos this past year must have been an answer to his prayers. What other connection could there be between "tebowing" and the game-winning overtime 80-yard touchdown pass to Demaryius Thomas against the highly favoured Pittsburgh Steelers?

But there are bad assumptions here. One is that the only thing that matters in sport is winning and losing, that these outcomes are all the game has to offer. Fitness, fellowship and fun don't enter the equation. Another bad assumption is that winning and prosperity result from faith. God is as much the God of the Broncos' subsequent loss to the Patriots, of fumbles, missed field goals and sideline-relegating injuries as he is of winning football games. It is bad theology to assume that winning comes from God and is an answer to prayer. Ultimately the purpose of a Christian is to glorify God in all things and enjoy him forever. Tim Tebow seems to have this sort of deep and abiding all-encompassing faith, which frees up any Christian to compete without holding onto winning or losing.



Tim Tebow in his "tebowing" posture.

So what does Tebow pray for? I am assuming he prays for strength, freedom from injury, gratitude and that he might glorify God in his play. He is not alone. I coach the girls soccer team at London District Christian Secondary School, and we pray before every game as the team takes the field. We thank God for health and the ability to play. We ask that we will reflect his name in all that we do. We pray for fellow team members who are injured or away. We don't "tebow," but we do huddle together and form a massive group of clasped hands in the middle. Does the other team know that we are praying? Do the fans? I don't really know. I've never heard even one comment about it. But I'm convinced that there are many ways in which athletes pray during play without heads bowed and eyes closed. These prayers are much less public, and the athletes who raise them choose to do so without public scrutiny.

Faith externalized for public consumption runs the risk of superficiality and needs to be properly rooted. Faith internalized that wrestles despair in the midnight hour could benefit from being shared and supported. Each has its place. But only one will see you through till morning comes. There is an important distinction to be made between Tim Tebow the man and the "Tebowmania" that resulted from his "tebowing." Sign me up in support of Tim Tebow the man, but I'm not getting on board the "Tebowmania" train.

Paul Buma teaches, coaches and is a guidance counsellor at London District Christian Secondary School. He is the unabashed winner of this year's football pool.

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The Cruyff turn

Michael Buma

My grandparents on both sides of the family left the Netherlands during the third major wave of Dutch immigration to Canada in the late 1940s and early '50s. Along with 15,000 or so of their Dutch compatriots during this time, they came to Canada in the hopes of building a new life and creating opportunity for subsequent generations.

And build they did. In addition to learning a new language, adjusting to life in a new country, and working tirelessly to establish prospects and careers, my grandparents' generation of Dutch Reformed immigrants built up a thriving network of churches, schools, trade unions, lobby groups, development organizations and, ahem, publications. In addition to shoring up the "tiny 'transforming' denomination" that has had such an "enormous influence on science, philosophy and the arts" over the years – as Philip Yancey has described the Christian Reformed Church – my grandparents and other Dutch Reformed immigrants like them passed on a commendable set of values to their children and grandchildren: hard work, selflessness, decency, cleanliness, community focus, simple living and, above all, faithfulness.

I'm not sure why, but growing up I believed these values to be generically "Dutch." When I was young I pictured the Netherlands as a place where everyone went to church on Sunday and ate *soep met balletjes* for lunch when they got home, just like us. Eventually I learned this wasn't the case, and that, like in most Western nations, Christianity is in decline in the Netherlands. But the disparity between my grandparents' Dutchness and contemporary Dutch culture didn't fully hit me until my wife and I backpacked through Europe in 2006 and spent some time in our ancestral homeland.

There's a moment in a Sietze Buning poem where upon learning that his son's family will spend the following year in Amsterdam, an American-Dutch Calvinist father replies: "O O O poor you! / Amsterdam is such a worldly city." Although I knew about Amsterdam's famous Red Light District and international reputation as a den of iniquity, I wasn't really prepared to see scantily-clad sex workers unabashedly plying their trade across the street from *De Oude Kerk* (one of the nation's most historically significant cathedrals). At that moment the gap between the "Dutch" tradition I'd been raised in and the actualities of contemporary Dutch society seemed completely incomprehensible. Was this really the same country that produced my grandparents and their values?

Franklin Foer has an entire book dedicated to the premise that "soccer explains the world," and in this case he just might be right. It wasn't until I read David Winner's *Brilliant Orange: The Neurotic Genius of Dutch Soccer* that I came to understand the social and cultural changes that essentially remade the Netherlands during the decades after my grandparents left.

Total football

According to Winner, the brilliance of Dutch soccer rests largely on the development of *totaalvoetbal* ("total football"), a tactical theory based on fluid motion and the interchangeability of player

The Cruyff turn *continued on page 5*

Editorial/Letters

The Cruyff turn *continued*

These video stills from the 1974 World Cup show Johann Cruyff performing his famous "Cruyff turn."

roles. Done well, *totaalvoetbal* is an unscripted sequence of movement and flow; it expands, contracts, adapts, creates and confounds. It relies heavily on teamwork, trust and instinct, and is fuelled by a burning, though not impatient, desire for offence. It's an artistry of attack.

Totaalvoetbal was developed by Amsterdam Ajax manager Rinus Michels in the late 1960s and early '70s, in large part under the on-field leadership of Johann Cruyff – who by all accounts was one of the most brilliant players of his generation. Cruyff is perhaps most famous for his signature move, the "Cruyff turn," which he showcased to the world during Holland's 1974 World Cup match against Sweden. Cruyff was in close quarters against Swedish defender Jan Olsson when he feinted to cross but instead changed directions in mid-air and flipped the ball back behind himself and free of Olsson's reach. When asked about the play later in life, Olsson recalled the moment as "the proudest memory of my [soccer] career. I thought I'd win the ball for sure, but he tricked me. I was not humiliated. I had no chance. Cruyff was a genius."

Cruyff's genius, however, wasn't limited to soccer. During the 1960s the so-called "pillars" (*zuilen*) of pre-WWII Dutch society – Calvinism, Catholicism and Socialism – were swept away in a tsunami of change. The conservative, compartmentalized and largely church-going nation that Abraham Kuyper presided over in the early 20th century was remade into the progressive, pluralist, materialist and socially-liberal Netherlands of today, one of the least religious countries in Europe. According to Dutch journalist Hubert Smeets, Cruyff played such a significant role in this transition that he essentially "made [the Netherlands] after the war" and "was the only one who really understood the '60s."

As a family man and Christian who also pushed the limits of the establishment, Cruyff embodied "both sides of the '60s and both sides of the baby boom" (Smeets). Cruyff was also, according to Smeets, altruistic on one hand and "aware of the new, upcoming neoliberalism in which money played a role and success was a moral category" on the other. And finally, to borrow this time from David Winner, Cruyff "was anti-system but, paradoxically, he had a system," one based on the sort of "creative individualism" that beyond pioneering *totaalvoetbal* would become axiomatic in the business school management models and corporate capitalist culture of the decades that followed.

My grandparents, then, left the Netherlands before the nation's socio-cultural Cruyff turn, bringing with them a version of Dutchness that would soon fade from prominence in the country they once called home. Although I now recognize my heritage to be more "Reformed" than "Dutch," I still get very excited about Dutch soccer – especially when a major international tournament rolls around. And why not? Despite the fact that the Dutch no longer play *totaalvoetbal*, the beautiful game still looks great in *oranje*.

Michael Buma teaches at the University of Western Ontario and is interim editor of the Christian Courier. *He tries to confound opponents on the soccer pitch by attempting the Cruyff turn, but usually loses the ball.*

Grace and wrath

In *CC* May 28, letter-writer Ray Stellingwerff took issue with my column in *CC* March 26 ("Who do you say I am?"). Stellingwerff said I seem to hold contradictory views about God's sovereignty. He wondered how I can "reconcile a God of the cosmos, which also includes apostates and Muslims, needing the assistance of the faithful to preserve his cosmological order. She commends 'defending the infinite glory of his name' as if the creator of the universe can seriously be offended by anything we do."

I didn't say anywhere in that column that God *needs* our assistance in preserving his cosmos. I'm sorry if something I did write led to that impression. The *need* is all ours. However, here's where Stellingwerff and I part ways: the Creator of the universe indeed not only can be, but is, not merely offended by our sin, but the Bible makes clear that *every day* God is filled with wrath against sin, and *every day* he punishes sin (in numerous ways). Our modern secular world aids and abets our downplaying of God's offence-filled wrath against sin. But that skirting of God's wrath is not the biblical picture. And knowing that our holy God cannot tolerate sin makes his saving grace to us in Christ all the more amazing.

That brings me to Mr. Stellingwerff's other point. He seemed to imply that there are no real unbelievers: "'True children' implies the existence of false, or illegitimate children." Yes, that *is* what it implies. Or rather, to use the biblical language, there are children and heirs – everyone who confesses Christ and is grafted into him by God's grace – and there are those who, through their denial of Christ, are not God's children and heirs and will suffer eternal condemnation. If that language "reveals a troubling militancy," then so does the Bible. It's not my language. Nor did I say that "God needs protection from such illegitimacy." If God does, "what then prevents a return to inquisition and persecution?" Stellingwerff asks. The great irony here is that persecution – of *Christians,* far beyond any other faith group – has never ended. In fact, throughout the 20th century and into our current century there have been more martyrs (who would not deny their Lord to save their lives here and now) than there were in all of previous church history going back to the New Testament. I suggest looking carefully at **www.presecution.org**.

Marian Van Til
CC columnist, "From the 11th Province"

"AND HE'LL FIX THE ECONOMY, STOP THE WARS, END WORLD HUNGER AND MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!
YOU THINK WE'RE EXPECTING TOO MUCH FROM TIM TEBOW?
MikeKeefe THE DENVER POST 10-15-11
caglecartoons.com

Messenger does the shooting

In "Of Grandmothers and ostriches" (CC April 23) May Drost writes about Christians who are suspicious and fearful about the things scientists discover. And that the church has often been shooting the messenger in the past. Drost regrets that three Calvin College professors have been reprimanded lately for their work.

I wonder if we can compare this to discovering that the earth is round? Or whether the earth moves or the sun or maybe both? If these professors would only claim that we descended from apes we could either take it or leave it. But they went on by saying that Adam and Eve were never really there and also the Fall into sin had never taken place. Does this not change the heart of the Gospel? Why would we need a Saviour?

It seems to me that the messenger in this case was shooting the church.

These professors suggested it is high time that scientists and theologians meet to find out how to read the first chapters of Genesis and also rewrite the Heidelberg Catechism. By reading more about this I discovered that some scientists call our sins bad habits and we inherited them from our animal forefathers. How does this explain abortion? Is this practice ever discovered among animals?

We should have great respect for the work of scientists, but I do not get all the answers I need from them. For me it is more helpful to read the Bible.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanstown, Ont.

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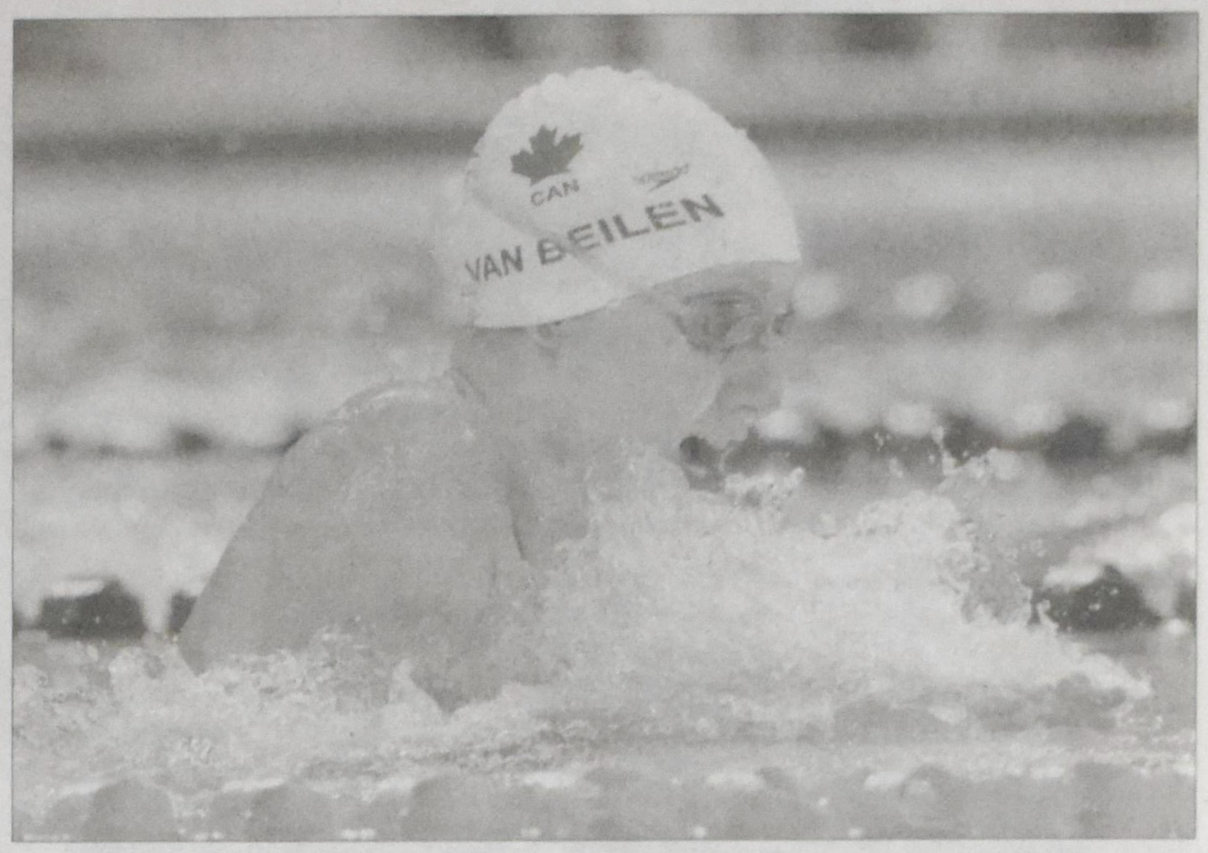
News

Swimming fast and serving God: a conversation with Tera Van Beilen



Tera Van Beilen's finish in the women's 200-metre breaststroke at the Olympic swim trials was the second-fastest in the world at the time, and she will represent Canada at the London Olympics in both the 100 and 200 metre breaststroke events. Van Beilen is a recent graduate of King's Christian Collegiate in Oakville, Ont. In this interview she talks to *CC* interim editor Michael Buma about training, dealing with the spotlight and what it means to be a Christian athlete.

This is a bit of an obvious question, but what does it feel like to have qualified for the Olympics?

I honestly can't explain or even remember how I was feeling right after I made the team, but now that it's all said and done, all I can say is that my dream has come true! When people congratulate me it still feels so surreal, but I am incredibly proud of myself and so happy and honoured that I can experience something that many people do not have the chance to do!

At what point did you realize that you were good at swimming and decide to really go for it? Did you ever think you would get this far? Did you ever want to give up?

I have been pretty athletic in many sports ever since I was little. But in swimming I always felt that God had given me a special talent. When I was about 13, I really knew that swimming was something I was very passionate about and wanted to see how far and fast I could get in my sport. I knew it definitely wouldn't be an easy task to reach the level of Olympic class, but it was something I always wanted to achieve. I visualized myself swimming at the Olympics and deep down in me, I knew it was something I could make a reality (although I didn't think it would happen as quickly as it did).

There have been many times throughout the years when I wondered if the level of fatigue, exhaustion and pain was all really worth it! There were times, looking back, when I remember having mental breakdowns and really not knowing if I could even make it through the next day, but in these times I remembered – and remember – that I am not on this journey alone! I have God in my life and that's something special that I can fall back on, and I know I can come to him in prayer during these very difficult times. A passage that stands out to me in the Bible comes from Proverbs 3:5-6 and it talks about trusting and leaning on God and that he has my future in his hands.

I also like to listen to Christian music to help remember that God is with me and I can find comfort in him. Some of my favourite songs have lyrics like "Nothing's gonna hold me back ... I am restless 'til I rest in you."

Could you describe a little about your training and fitness routine? What does an athlete do to prepare for the Olympics?

I train every day except for Sundays. Monday through Friday I swim for 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours at night, and have an hour and a half dry land session in the afternoon. On Saturday I swim just once in the morning. I am training close to 30 hours a week, not including physiotherapy and massage therapy. I nap every day for about 2-3 hours between my sessions, so it doesn't leave much time for "social activities."

Many people think that swimmers simply swim back and forth several times and that training must be very boring. Sometimes this is the case, but we also use tension cords that we tie around our waists and we swim against the resistance. We also use a pulley system in which a cord is tied around our waist and we swim to try to raise buckets filled with water. Our dry land training consists of running, lifting weights and throwing 10 pound medicine balls at our partners.

The following lines from Angie Abdou's novel *The Bone Cage* describe a Canadian swimmer training for the Olympics: "Her life had narrowed, focused, until it was just her body and the water immediately surrounding it. Every practice required her full concentration. To be the best, to win, she had to pay attention to the minute details of every second, every stroke." Is this how you view your training? Does this description ring true?

Yes, this is definitely a quote that is right on point as to what goes on in my head! You have to go into every practice knowing that it is an opportunity to get stronger and make yourself better. There are definitely some days when the last thing I want to do is get out of bed and go to practice. In my workouts, I sometimes think that there is absolutely no way I can do a certain set and my coach tells me that even if it takes me all day to complete I have to finish it and do it right! Not only does my effort have to be 100 percent, but my technique also must be perfect. These are the things that make me love my sport! Completing a successful workout and knowing that I did my absolute best and gave everything I had is incredibly satisfying.

Not only do I need to be absolutely focused in my training, but the things you do outside of workouts are also a key element to success. I need to get enough sleep, and that means going to bed really early and having naps, as well as sacrificing my Friday and Saturday nights to rest and recover for the following week. Eating right is also another essential component to recovery. I need to be fueling my body with the right foods in order to attain my maximum potential in training. Staying on top of school while training full time has also been a struggle, and sometimes I still don't know how I do it all. But being in swimming for many years, I have learned a lot about self-discipline and dedication. I realized at a young age that I needed to apply all of these qualities to my everyday life in order to become one of the best. As hard as it is every day to persevere through these obstacles, I still completely love my sport.

When you won the Olympic trials your bio didn't even appear in the official Swimming Canada media guide. Now you're getting all kinds of media attention. How does the spotlight feel? How do you stay grounded and focused?

It's definitely still crazy to think that people want my autograph or want to interview me or take a picture. I still feel like a regular girl, the same person I was before all this happened ... I just go through the water a bit faster. Above all I want to be humble. James 3: 13-14 says "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."

I know myself well enough to know that I will always be me, and that's all I can be. I swim fast and have a passion for swimming but there are many people who are good at other things, so we need to celebrate the gifts of others too. I recently talked at an assembly at my elementary and high school and it was a humbling experience to share my journey of being a normal kid, fulfilling my dream and inspiring kids to work hard at their various gifts or talents.

What role does your Christian education and upbringing play in your swimming career? What does your success mean for your school and church community?

I have been truly blessed to have been brought up in a Christian family. Being surrounded by loving people who have a relationship with Christ definitely has an influence on me and how I live my life. I have learned about how self should be in perspective to God. We are his, created by him for a purpose. My Christian parents, teachers and pastors have taught me that our worth is in who we are as people and as followers of Christ, and that we are all loved for being who we are and not what we do. My teachers have been incredibly supportive in helping me handle my schoolwork while missing school, as well as praying for me before swim meets.

I have received huge encouragement from immediate and extended family, church

See **Swimming fast** *on p. 7*

Christianity and the Olympics

Blair Whitmarsh

The first Olympic Games for citizens of Greece were held in Olympia in 776 BC. The five day event was sensationally popular despite the terrible conditions for spectators which included rotting garbage, lack of accommodation, no clean water, insect plagues and dry hot conditions. As many as 70,000 people would arrive after three to four days of travel by foot just for a chance to see the great athletes perform. All wars and fighting were put on hold for 30 days prior to the games and 30 days after so that all of Greece could take part in the celebration. Paul refers to the Games throughout scripture when he compares the Christian life to that of an athlete training to compete. They were the most significant cultural event of their time and were held every four years for almost 1200 years, until the Christian emperors banned pagan festivals in AD 394.

The Olympics were reborn when Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French historian, founded the International Olympic Committee and held the first modern games in Athens in 1896. The primary difference was that the modern Olympics would be open to all citizens of the world. Today, the modern Olympic Games are the most watched, most talked about and most expensive sporting and cultural event in the world. The most recent summer games in Beijing had more than 10,000 competitors in 302 events, over 1,000 sport officials, more than 100,000 volunteers, millions of onsite spectators and over a billion viewers through television and internet. All evidence points to the London Olympics of 2012 being the most significant Olympics yet. There is simply no other event that brings the world together in a common celebration of the human spirit and achievement.

The Olympic Games Creed coined by de Coubertin is "The most important thing is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered, but to have fought well." This creed is the basis on which all athletes compete and yet despite the many examples of courage, compassion and sportsmanship there are unending examples of cheating, drug use, political statements, racism, sexism and the humiliation of one over another. This was certainly not the intention of the IOC in their creation of the modern Olympic Games, but there is no doubt that the Games have become a quagmire of positive benefits and negative consequences for all who participate or observe them.

The Olympic Games brings out the best and the worst of humanity. There are wonderful examples of self-sacrifice and sportsmanship such as Carl Ludwig Lutz Long giving advice in the long jump to Jessie Owens in the 1936 Olympics, even though that advice resulted in a defeat for Lutz Long. Or the 1964 Winter Games when Eugenio Monti gave a bolt from his bobsled to the British Team who went on the win the gold medal. However, there are numerous examples of cheating athletes like the infamous Ben Johnson and others who used performance enhancing drugs. And there is the ever-increasing emphasis on materialism, personal fame and wealth, and the use of sex to promote and sell the games.

An artist's drawing of the Olympic stadium in London, England. The upcoming Olympics promise to be the most significant yet.

How to respond?

So, how should Christians respond to the games? Should the Christian response be one of full engagement even though there are so many aspects of the Games that may be in conflict with a biblical world view? Should Christians ignore the Games as a pagan celebration with little or no redeeming value? How do we integrate our Christian values of love, peace, self-control and faith into a worldly event that glorifies winning at all costs, personal achievement and the pursuit of riches and fame?

There are three likely approaches that Christians take when integrating their faith with the secular and the discussion around a Christian view of the Olympic Games is no exception. The first response is the total withdrawal from the secular. This approach holds that the values of the Olympic Games are so distinct from biblical values that there is no way to successfully integrate them. The individual pursuit of fame, glory, and winning at all costs stares in the face of putting others first and being a person of grace and compassion. This would have been the perspective of the Christian emperors when they cancelled the ancient Olympic Games.

The second, most common approach, by those claiming to be Christian, is to live a dual life. The Christian life, best shown on Sundays and mid-week Bible studies, rarely intersects with their work, recreation or social lives. There is a distinct separation between "spiritual" activities and "non-spiritual" activities. It is for this reason that some people can cheat, cuss and fight in sport during the week and then live a "holy" life on Sundays. They live both parts of their lives but choose to live them independent of each other. People who accept this viewpoint see the Olympic Games as an incredible celebration and accept virtually all that the event stands for and has to offer.

The final response is one of attempting to integrate Christian faith within the world of sport and its biggest celebration, the Olympic Games. People in this approach understand that there are some very good things that come from the Olympic Games but there are also some serious ethical challenges. Yes, the Olympic Games can be a celebration of God's greatest creation but, there are many things that need to be addressed if they are truly going to be a God-honouring event. Unfortunately the world has a way of turning the beautiful into ugly and the honourable into dishonour.

The appeal of sports

Why are people so fascinated by sport competitions? What attracts people to the Olympic Games with such significant numbers and passion? I think it goes deeper than simply loving sport. There is a deep attraction to human achievement whether in music, intellectual capacity or athletics. It is part of the human condition that we love to see what we are collectively capable of even if we might never achieve that level as an individual. There is a sense that we are part of them and they are part of us – we are connected as created beings whether we care to acknowledge the creator or not.

The Olympic Games were started as a pagan festival to honour Zeus, the most powerful of all the Greek gods. When the games were revised in 1896 it was for the purpose of showcasing athletic achievements within a framework of sportsmanship, honour and fairness. It is true that the original purpose of the Olympic Games, like many other great institutions such as democracy, music and the Christian church, have often been clouded or even desecrated by human desires and greed. However, this is no reason to throw the Games away or believe that they have no redeeming qualities. The Olympic Games should be seen as an imperfect, humanly created opportunity to celebrate the amazing creation of God through the spectacle of sport and athletic achievement. It is not a perfect event and we would not even call it a "Christian" event, but it is still worth watching and participating in. Being created in God's image creates a desire in all of us to celebrate our humanness, and the Olympic Games provides one of the greatest ways to celebrate God's greatest creation – mankind.

Dr. Blair Whitmarsh is the Dean of Human Kinetics and Athletics at Trinity Western University and a certified consultant with the Canadian Sport Psychology Association. He combines his experience as an athlete, coach and researcher while giving lectures and conducting workshops/coaching clinics in the areas of mental preparation for sport and peak performance.

Swimming fast and serving God *continued*

family and my Christian school family. They recognize my talent and also treasure me as a fellow Christian, and I am very glad I am able to have such a close knit group of supporters.

Sometimes during swim meets, I'll pray with my teammates. It is cool to see how much they appreciate my prayers and I want to be able to shine my life in Christ on the pool deck.

How does your love for Christ factor into your swimming? What does it mean to be a Christian athlete?

I love God and it is a joy to use the gift that he has given me. I couldn't have worked this hard and had my successes without his strength and comfort. When I don't want to get out of bed to swim, and I just do not love my sport at that moment, he helps me put things in perspective. When I am active, it makes me happy and I feel that I am living my best as God would want me to live. When I am training hard and doing my best I feel his pleasure. I listen to Christian music that really helps me to focus on God and his love for me and his purpose for me. I pray and read the Bible to keep me close to him and get some face time with him.

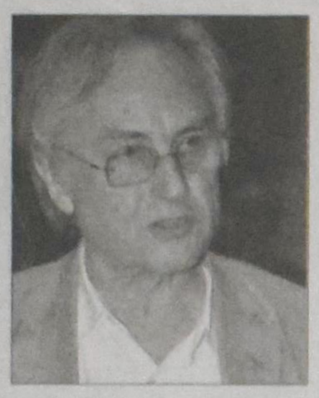
I try to live a Christian lifestyle around my teammates and come to practice with a smile on my face every day so that I may be a joy to others around me. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have ... but do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

Every Christian needs to run a race and have good self discipline. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly" (1 Corinthians 9:23-25). Eternal life is our final destiny but we can learn a whole lot here on earth about running a good race.

Michael Buma teaches at the University of Western Ontario and is interim editor of the Christian Courier.

News

Dawkins hopes free Bibles will turn kids off Scriptures



LONDON (TCI) – The famous British atheist-scientist Richard Dawkins is backing a scheme to send a commemorative copy of the King James Bible to every state school in the UK, but only because he thinks it will turn kids off the Scriptures.

Late last month Michael Gove, Britain's Education Secretary, began sending out commemorative copies of the Bibles to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James Version. Professor Dawkins said that the initiative is justified because of the historic text's impact on the English language. He even said that he would have made a financial contribution to the £370,000 scheme if he had been approached.

However, Dawkins made clear that his underlying motive was the hope that the scheme would turn youngsters off the Bible. Dawkins wrote in *The Observer*, "I have an ulterior motive for wishing to contribute to Gove's scheme. People who do not know the Bible well have been gulled into thinking it is a good guide to morality. Whatever else the Bible might be – and it really is a great work of literature – it is not a moral book and young people need to learn that important fact because they are very frequently told the opposite."

In November the Queen attended a special service at Westminster Abbey marking the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible. During the service Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams described the King James Bible as an "extraordinary text" which remains of "abiding importance."

Number of 'pro-choice' Americans hits record low

WASHINGTON, D.C. (LifeSiteNews.com) – A Gallup poll conducted May 3-6 and released late last month reveals a record-low number of Americans describing themselves as "pro-choice."

The poll found only 41 percent of Americans would embrace the "pro-choice" moniker, the lowest level since Gallup began asking the question in 1995. Exactly 50 percent said they identified as pro-life. The poll's results are a stunning turnaround from the first survey to ask this question. In 1995, 56 percent of Americans described themselves as "pro-choice," and only 33 percent of Americans were "pro-life."

A majority of Americans believe abortion is immoral, the most recent survey found. Those who believe abortion is wrong exceed those who do not by a wide margin: 13 percentage points (51 percent to 38 percent).

The Gallup poll also contains revelations that may relate to the 2012 presidential election. For only the second time, more independent voters identify as "pro-life" (47 percent) than "pro-choice" (41 percent). *The Hill* newspaper reports that Mitt Romney has led Barack Obama by an average of 6.5 percent among independent voters in 12 of the 14 polls taken over the last two months.

Breakdown among Republicans and Democrats was more predictable, but members of both parties are "trending" more pro-life. Pollsters found 72 percent of Republicans are "pro-life," one of the highest margins ever, while only 22 percent are "pro-choice," a record low. Among Democrats, one-third (34 percent) say they are "pro-life." Fifty-eight percent say they are "pro-choice," but that is the lowest level since 2003.

In the Gallup poll, 25 percent of those surveyed believed abortion should be legal in all circumstances; while 20 percent believe abortion should be illegal in all circumstances.

Another recent poll, from the Charlotte Lozier Institute, found 77 percent of Americans oppose sex-selective abortion. And last December, 79 percent of Americans said they supported restricting abortion to the first trimester. A majority would also limit abortion to cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother, according to a Knights of Columbus/Marist College poll.

Christians, Muslims, Buddhists unite to fight legalization of abortion on isle of Mauritius

PORT-LOUIS, Mauritius (LSN) – Christians, Muslims and Buddhists are providing a common front against legislation that would relax abortion laws on their island nation of Mauritius, while United Nations bureaucrats and the human rights group Amnesty International are urging the Mauritian government to approve the bill.

The Republic of Mauritius lies off the southeast coast of Africa and from 1810 until 1968 was controlled by Great Britain.

Roman Catholics and Anglicans, along with Muslims and Buddhists have created the "Platform for Life," an umbrella group that affirms the fundamental value of human life. A rally held by the platform on May 20, the day the bill was debated in the republic's Parliament, drew 400 people, including religious leaders, doctors, politicians and pro-life activists.

The bill, which was approved by the government's Council of Ministers on May 4, would legalize abortion in cases of danger to the woman's "mental health," a vague concept that can be used to justify virtually any abortion. It would also permit abortions in cases or rape, or statutory rape of a minor under the age of 16, as well as eugenic abortions in cases of fetal deformity. It is currently illegal in Mauritius to kill unborn children in any circumstance. A final vote on the reform bill has not yet been held.

The impending repeal of the law follows years of pressure by the United Nations committee that monitors compliance with the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has begun in recent years to claim that the Convention requires Mauritius and other countries to legalize abortion. At a debate at the University of Mauritius, a representative from the CEDAW Committee, Pramila Patten, reiterated the Committee's position that "Mauritius has the obligation to legalize abortion by amending the penal code," in the words of the Mauritian newspaper *L'express*.

Amnesty International also issued a statement on the bill, reiterating the organization's position that prohibiting abortion to rape and incest victims is tantamount to "torture."

Prominent pastor leaves CRC

Michael Buma

Former *Banner* editor and Institute for Christian Studies president John Suk has announced he is resigning as pastor of Grace CRC in Cobourg, Ont. and stepping away from ministry in the denomination. Suk cited increasing doubt about some of the denomination's official teachings as the reason for his departure.

Commenting on his decision in a recent blog post, Suk wrote that "The kinds of issues I changed my mind about are contentious in many denominations: gay marriage, evolution, the inspiration and authority of scripture, and so on." But perhaps more than any particular issue or change of opinion, the deeper root of Suk's departure seems to be the CRC's strict adherence to its historical Confessions.

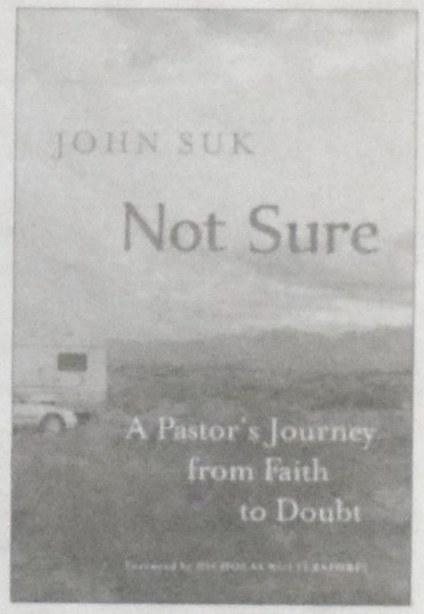
Pastors and officebearers in the CRC are required to sign a Form of Subscription stating that the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort "fully agree with the Word of God." By signing the form, church leaders pledge that they will faithfully defend and "never contradict" the doctrines set forward in these Confessions. As of *CC* press time, a revised Form of Subscription known as the Covenant for Officebearers is scheduled for review by Synod. The new form, if accepted, will assert that the confessions "continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ."

Suk has come to believe that the Form of Subscription puts unreasonable constraints on church leaders and gives the Confessions too much authority in the denomination. In a blog post written shortly before the announcement of his resignation, he suggested that it might be time to find "some new category for the Confessions that would give them some educational prominence, but take away their coercive edge.... We could, in other words, honour them, learn from them, but not be bound by them. The only official confession we really need anymore, as far as I can tell, is the one scripture suggests in Romans 10:9: Jesus is Lord."

A difficult position

"Among those who actually know the Confessions," Suk notes, "I run into more and more people – mostly fellow pastors – who are not convinced that the Confessions get it mostly right." As a result, "many people [end up] signing the Form of Subscription with their fingers crossed, so to speak." The Form of Subscription, then, puts ministry leaders whose beliefs don't align exactly with the Confessions in a difficult position.

In the later blog post Suk notes that if he was not a pastor in the CRC but "just another member, sitting in the pews from Sunday to Sunday" he would "probably never leave." While members are able to keep their "intellectual doubts" to themselves, Suk suggests, the role of leaders is different: "as a leader, my deepest convictions are supposed to find expression in my preaching. I'm supposed to define the benchmarks. I can't do that anymore. And if I tried to do so, I would end up rocking the boat badly. That wouldn't be good or fair to [my] congregation. I wasn't hired to be a loose canon."



While many were surprised by Suk's decision to leave the CRC, his struggles with doubt have been no secret. Last year Suk published *Not Sure: A Pastor's Journey from Faith to Doubt*, which examines his own life and the history of the church in light of a crisis of faith he experienced while travelling around the U.S. in an RV with his wife.

Suk plans to pursue ministry in the United Church of Canada, but notes that his departure from the CRC will not be easy: "The decision to resign is painful for me. I grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, was loved and nurtured into faith, and even today it feels like the home I will always be welcomed back to, even if I'm now something of a prodigal son. The Christian Reformed Church is the skeleton around which I've built my life. Leaving is going to feel like an out of body experience."

News

Ontario: Access to abortion data secretly blocked, even with Freedom of Information request

OTTAWA (LifeSiteNews.com) – Pro-life activists in Ontario are outraged after the province quietly passed a bill at the end of May saying abortion data can no longer be obtained through a Freedom of Information request.

An amendment to the province's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) was silently slipped in as part of a larger bill titled "An Act to increase the financial accountability of organizations in the broader public sector."

Part VIII of the 2010 Bill 122 amended FIPPA so that the act "does not apply to records relating to the provision of abortion services." Bill 122 received Royal Assent in December 2010 and came into effect in January of this year.

Numerous transcripts from the Legislative Assembly of Ontario record no debate on the issue of restricting access to abortion data in the province. "It all happened under the radar," wrote pro-life blogger Patricia Maloney. Maloney discovered the effects of the new law after recently asking the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to provide some abortion statistics. She was shocked when she received the following response from the Ministry's office: "Please be advised that effective Jan. 1, 2012, section 65 of the Act ... was amended to exclude records relating to the provision of abortion services. The effect of section 65 (5.7) of the Act is that individuals no longer have a right to make access requests under Part II of FIPPA to an institution for records in the custody or under the control of that institution relating to the provision of abortion services."

Radio station CFRA 580's conservative host Nick Vandergragt criticized the McGuinty government over the airwaves for stooping to the level of using an "act unrelated" to ban access to abortion data. "Why did he do that? Because he wants to hide that information," Vandergragt asserted.

LifeSiteNews contacted the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care asking why the provision was stuck into a large act seemingly through a backdoor without any debate, but received no reply.

Maloney called the government's strategy a form of "despotic secrecy," comparing it to something from the "world of Orwell." In an open letter to Tim Hudak, leader of the PC Opposition, Maloney wrote, "Can you imagine what would have happened in Ontario if the exclusion clause instead excluded 'breast cancer services'? This would mean that we would no longer know how many women get breast cancer, how many die from breast cancer and whether or not our Ontario health care system was taking care of women who have breast cancer, and what the outcome was of their breast cancer treatment. The outrage would be deafening."

Irony

Meanwhile, in an op-ed piece in the *Calgary Herald* Margaret Somerville, professor of law and director of the McGill Centre for Medicine, slammed the Ontario government for making secret "the facts on abortion." Wrote Somerville, "The government … just want[s] the issue of abortion to go away and hope[s] that secrecy of information will help to achieve that outcome."

Somerville pointed out the irony of amending FIPPA, an act which is meant to "augment the transparency, openness and accountability of all levels of government," adding that "we often speak of such restrictions, when they are imposed in non-democratic countries, as a breach of human rights."

Maloney went a step further than Somerville, noting that the government's move betrays the title of the Act. "This manoeuvre actually greatly decreased 'financial accountability' since all access to abortion related information in the province of Ontario is now prohibited."

LifeSiteNews contacted Joyce Arthur, executive director of Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, to get her comment on the newly revised law that curtails access to information on abortion, but received no reply.

"To be very clear, this issue is not a pro-life or a pro-choice issue," summarized Maloney. "It is a pro-democracy issue. It doesn't matter if you are pro-life or you are pro-choice. The result is that all access to abortion related information in the province of Ontario is now prohibited. It is comprehensive."

Ontario Catholic schools oppose requirement for 'gay-straight alliances'

OTTAWA (CWN) – Catholic schools in Ontario are opposing legislation that would require schools to allow students to form "gay-straight alliances."

Ontario education minister Laurel Broten has put forward a proposal that would allow the formation of clubs to oppose "homophobia" and intolerance. The minister's proposal does not give school administrators authority over the names of the clubs.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association held a press conference on May 28 to voice opposition to the proposal. Marino Gazzola, the group's president, said, "We expect our boards will obey," if the legislation is enacted, but that the group would "review and reassess our options."

Gazzola told an interviewer that the Catholic school group supports the formation of clubs that oppose intolerance, but objects to the explicit identification of "gay" groups. Any clubs formed in Catholic schools, said Gazzola, "would focus on Catholic values."

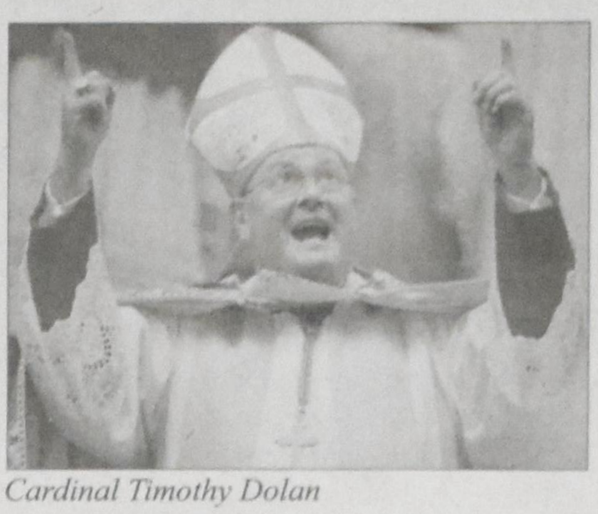
Follow-up:

43 American Catholic groups sue Obama admin over healthcare mandate

SOUTH BEND, Indiana (LSN) – In what they called "a coordinated defense of religious liberty," on the 21st of May 43 Roman Catholic organizations across the U.S. filed a dozen lawsuits to strike down the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate that will require them to provide contraception, including abortifacients and sterilization, for all employees.

Among the plaintiffs are numerous "big names" in the American Roman Catholic Church, including the archdioceses of New York, Washington and St. Louis; the dioceses of Dallas-Fort Worth, Fort Wayne-South Bend and Pittsburgh; the Michigan Catholic Conference; and the University of Notre Dame, Catholic University of America and the Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Archbishop of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan said the step was necessary "to protect our religious liberties from unwarranted and unprecedented government intrusion." The Archdiocese of Washington has created a website dedicated to the new lawsuit. Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, D.C., calls the mandate a "government attempt to force the church out of the public square."



Cardinal Timothy Dolan

Fall from 'grace'

The lawsuit has moral support well outside the Roman Catholic Church. These 43 Catholic institutions "are fighting back to protect the religious liberties of all Americans," said Family Research Council president Tony Perkins, expressing the views of many Protestants as well as Muslims and people of some other faiths. "We stand with these Catholic organizations that have refused to give up their long held constitutional right to the free exercise of religion."

Perhaps nothing so encapsulated President Obama's fall from grace with American Catholics as the participation of the University of Notre Dame, said many observers. (Obama's invitation to deliver the 2009 commencement address stirred controversy among traditional Catholics because of his extreme "pro-choice" views.)

"We have filed this lawsuit neither lightly nor gladly, but with sober determination," wrote Notre Dame President Fr. John Jenkins in a letter explaining his actions. "Let me say very clearly what this lawsuit is not about: it is not about preventing women from having access to contraception, nor even about preventing the government from providing such services…. We do not seek to impose our religious beliefs on others; we simply ask that the government not impose its values on the university when those values conflict with our religious teachings."

"Notre Dame cannot be forced to give up its beliefs on abortifacients, sterilization, or contraception, nor its devotion to serving all mankind, without violating its religious beliefs and compromising its religious purpose," the university's legal complaint states.

If the U.S. Supreme Court concludes that some or all of "Obamacare" is unconstitutional (the decision will be announced sometime this month) the lawsuits may be moot. Otherwise, if religious institutions fail to comply with the regulations promulgated next year, they could face a penalty of $100 per day per individual covered. In an online video, Chancellor Jane Belford of the Archdiocese of Washington said that could cost that diocese $4.2 million a year.

Although Notre Dame's Fr. Jenkins does "not question the good intentions and sincerity" of administration officials, he warned if the HHS mandate were accepted, it "will be the end of genuinely religious organizations in all but name."

Religious symbols banned from London Olympics 'faith' badge

LONDON (TCI) – A "faith" badge designed for chaplains at the London Olympic Games later this summer has banned all religious symbols – in case they cause offence.

The London Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) called on its advisory committee of faith representatives to provide ideas for the badge intended to be the symbol of the role of religious leaders for London 2012.

But plans for a design with symbols of each of the nine faiths represented on the committee were rejected on the grounds that not all religious believers would feel "comfortable" wearing symbols of other faiths.

The final badge simply features the word "faith" and a globe, alongside the Olympics and Paralympics logos. It will be worn by the 193 chaplains who will look after athletes, officials, staff and members of the media during the Olympics.

The organizers argue that a badge displaying the nine symbols of faith – including the cross and Islamic crescent – would have "limited" the "appeal" to religious athletes and spectators. The group also dismissed other proposals for the design, including an image of a lit candle.

Duncan Green, the Anglican priest who is head of LOCOG's multi-faith services, said, "We discussed lots of ideas – it is always difficult to get a symbol that is comfortable with everyone. We wanted something that people of all faiths could wear and feel comfortable with and that showed the world faiths coming together. If we want something that appeals to all faiths it has to be neutral."

Columns

Bubba, Tiger and the nature of sport

Brian Bolt

Today's men's professional golf tournaments generate two headlines: The winner – and Tiger Woods.

In 2012, a tearful Bubba Watson slid his arms into the famed green jacket, the Masters Golf Tournament symbol of victory, while Tiger's headline featured another disappointing performance at a major and his petulant on course behaviour, having kicked a club in anger during the second round. Although on the surface these men seem very different, golf fans, and Christians in particular, are intrigued by both figures, a phenomenon that reveals something about faith, sport, and us.

Moments after his dramatic playoff win, Bubba Watson publicly thanked his "Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" drawing many Christian sports fans to his side. Watson's post-victory gratitude exemplifies what has become common in high profile sports. Christians are fascinated with athletes who have achieved at the highest level while confessing allegiance to Christ. Perhaps we admire and aspire to the boldness and openness of their commitments, or though we're less likely to admit it, we are buoyed and gratified when fellow Christians outperform "secular" opponents.

Christians accept or even expect these public testimonies with appropriate caution. Podium preaching and skyward gestures can send unintended messages of religious pride and arrogance, and embarrassing moral failures of sports stars and politicians heighten our radar for inauthentic or self-promoting declarations. Bubba Watson however, was outspoken about his Christian faith long before winning the Masters and is known for a humble attitude, generosity, and his unique twitter handle: *Christian. Husband. Daddy. Pro Golfer. Owner of General Lee 1.*

Moments after his dramatic playoff win at the Masters, Bubba Watson publicly thanked his "Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Conversely, Tiger Woods experienced one of the most epic and public moral and professional collapses in sports. On top of the golf world, Tiger held the number one ranking and was on pace to surpass Jack Nicklaus by winning 19 majors. A child prodigy, Woods demonstrated laser-like focus in the most pressure filled moments. Tiger carried himself with supreme self-confidence some would call arrogance; to Tiger, opponents were inconsequential. But after his neighbourhood car crash, Tiger's world imploded. The media uncovered multiple extra-marital affairs and exposed the lengths Woods took to keep his double life a secret. Tiger's wife, many of his sponsors, and his golf game left him. Tiger plummeted in the world golf rankings, and until a recent victory, had gone winless for more than two years. Unlike Watson, Tiger Woods never claimed to be a Christian. In fact, political commentator Brit Hume earned both praise and criticism when on a Fox News program he implored Tiger to "turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a *great* example to the world."

Bubba and Tiger: two professional golfers, and two seemingly very different people. Yet many of the same Christians who celebrate Bubba Watson for his Christian declarations root equally as hard for Tiger Woods, even now. Why?

Ancient heroes

Since the birth of organized sports almost 3000 years ago in ancient Greece, the sport-following public has been enamoured with heroes. The Olympic and other Greek games produced elite athletes of great renown – sport "gods" equal in fame to today's sport stars. Boxer Diagorus of Rhodes earned multiple victories, and like Bubba Watson, was known both for his athletic prowess and humble spirit. The ancient poet Pindar wrote of Diagorus' "now famous arête in boxing … he travels the straight path which despises hubris." The Greeks spoke of "arête," referring to excellence with humility. Truly, Diagorus was an athlete to be admired, imitated and remembered.

Yet the memory of another Greek athlete, Milo of Kroton, lives on with equal or more veracity. As a wrestler, Milo won six Olympiads in a row (held four years apart). Milo was so strong he carried a full size bull on his shoulders, then killed, roasted and ate it in one sitting. It was said that he could snap a cord tied around his head, just by straining his veins. Milo's hubris was also legendary, symbolized by his ignominious death, when he arrogantly removed wedges from a tree with his bare hands. Milo's hands became stuck when the tree collapsed, and wolves

See **The nature of sport** *on p. 11*

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

My sporting life

My parents valued hard work and solid academics, but never placed much emphasis on athletics. As a matter of fact, my mother strongly opposed girls participating in competitive sports. She felt sure such activities fostered unladylike aggression and posed significant risks for injury.

In school I excelled at reading and spelling. However, I distinctly remember feeling inferior when we trained for our first track and field day. In the dashes and distance runs, a number of my peers suddenly took off and left the rest of us far behind. I fared a little better in high jump, probably because of my height, but my clumsiness produced some awkward, if amusing landings.

Our school also held an annual Play Day, where the entire student body was divided into squads, each of which included kids from every grade level. We spent the day running relays and playing all sorts of team games. Despite my mother's protests, participation was mandatory. Aside from Field Day, it was also the only time girls were allowed to wear shorts to school, another behaviour my mother considered to be conduct unbecoming.

Her misgivings only intensified when, in grade three, I came home from Play Day with my knees ripped open and my shins badly scraped. During one of the relays our "human train" piled up on itself and I had been literally dragged several feet on the tarmac.

It took the whole summer for my wounds to heal completely, but our team placed second overall that day. The royal blue ribbon and the attention I had suddenly received from my teammates more than made up for my battered legs. When I returned to school in September, my scarred knees garnered me respect as a person who would "take it for the team."

The summer I turned twelve, my best friend gave me one of her brother's old baseball gloves and together we tried out for the town league. I neglected to mention my new found interest to my mother, even when I was actually chosen for the team. I couldn't wait to wear the brilliant gold shirt with the blue lettering. Surely once my mother saw that beautiful uniform she would understand my desperation to play ball.

But on the very night the uniforms arrived, a player accidentally flung her bat and it struck me right between the eyes. The massive goose egg on the bridge of my nose and the spectrum of colours across my cheekbones made it impossible for me to sell the idea of team membership to my mom. With deep regret I returned the coveted jersey to the coach.

A gymnasium was built when I was in eighth grade and I discovered another sport where height was an asset. I turned into a pretty good basketball player, until the day when I jumped at centre against the grade 6 teacher – a jovial, but very large man. He landed squarely on my big toe. I lost the toenail about two months later, much to my mother's disgust.

Lessons learned

C.S. Lewis said that sports don't so much build character as reveal it. I learned a lot about myself and others through my athletic misadventures. I observed that perseverance is just as important as talent. I learned about fair play, good sportsmanship and the fellowship that comes from belonging to a team. I came to accept that God had not particularly gifted me as an athlete, but that my best efforts were still important. What I lacked in prowess I tried to make up for with enthusiasm. It seems my greatest contributions were the ability to encourage others and to bring comedic relief to the game at hand (often unintentionally).

In my late 30s I played women's slow-pitch with the church team. I gained the confidence to start coaching my kids and their friends at their school's informal Monday night baseball games. One summer evening I stood at home plate, knocking fly balls and grounders to a field full of kids. Some threw the balls back to me with very little effort.

"Come on guys, I don't feel like fetching the balls," I shouted. "Put some snap into it!" And I hit another ball into the air without realizing there was one heading straight for me. It smacked me in the left eye and the blood streamed down my face. The bleeding pretty much stopped when the swelling took over.

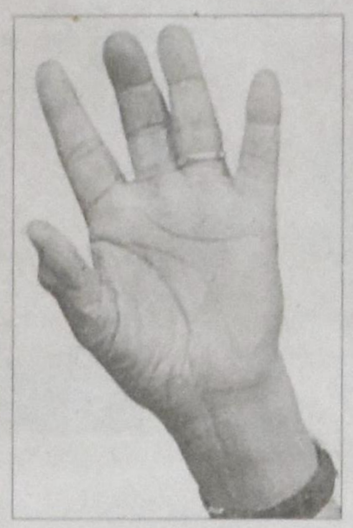
I lay on the table in the emergency room waiting for the doctor to stitch me up. In spite of my throbbing brow I had to laugh at myself. I always told the kids to keep their "eye on the ball," but this wasn't quite what I meant.

Then I thought of my mother and how I would have to explain my new look to her. Maybe she had a point about the risk of injury thing – yet another valuable lesson from my sporting life.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.

My Father's hands: *a Father's Day musing*

Teresa Boer-Gravelle



It's not that easy to pick a pair of hands out of a line up without some key identifiers. Can you identify these famous hands? See page 23 for answers.

Hands are such everyday things. We use them without thinking about them. We type, text, dial, staple, sort, point and write with them. We fix coffee to exact specifications with our hands. We wash dishes, plant annuals, sort laundry and prepare meals with our hands. Our hands steer our vehicles. Sometimes we smack them on a hard surface in frustration, sometimes we use them to check a forehead for fever, brush the hair out of our eyes or stroke a pet. I point and click my way through the work day, my hand automatically operating the mouse on the periphery of my vision and awareness.

Our vocabulary is replete with references to hands:

"Can I give you a hand with that?"

"Can you hand out these power point slides for me?"

"I've got to hand it to you, Peg. These renovations are awesome!"

"This sweater? Just a hand-me-down from my sister."

"By a show of hands, who thinks Teresa takes fantastic minutes?"

Yep – hands are a big part of daily life. But unless you are chirophobic (literally, someone with a phobia of hands), hands are not the first thing we notice about a person. Occasionally, we do pay attention to our hands – if they develop an irritating callous or suffer a painful burn or ache with arthritis. Sometimes we dress them up – millions are spent by women and men on manicures each year. And they do have the important task of carrying wedding rings!

Mostly, hands are ordinary. It's not that easy to pick a pair of hands out of a line-up without some key identifiers. Can you identify the famous hands above?

Yes, recognizing a pair of hands might require a unique characteristic of some kind. Or maybe it just depends on whether those hands have touched your life in a special way. I have a vivid mental picture of my dad's hands. A lifetime of hard work as an insulator and farmer left him with arthritic calloused hands upon which the veins stood out in stark relief, his fingers swollen and crooked. Some mornings he would have to soak them in warm water for ten minutes before they would loosen up enough so he could button his overalls and head for the barn. But they were wonderfully comforting hands and gentle. I could identify them in a heartbeat. Likewise, my husband's hands. He's another one who makes his living with his hands and they, too, are rough, occasionally blistered and bruised from a stubborn pipe fitting. They bear old burn marks from his years of welding, scars and bone spurs from his days of life on the street, and a stretch of skin that burns when the temperature drops below zero, the lingering consequence of a previous bad case of frostbite. I think I could pick out my husband's hands in the middle of an arena of hockey fans doing the wave!

Someone recently asked me, "Can you see God's hands in your life?" The literalist in me, the one who examines sentences for dangling modifiers and reckless pronouns, just had to counter, grinning, "If you mean can I see God's hands AT WORK in my life – then yes, absolutely."

God's hands at work

If you were pressed for examples of seeing God's hands at work in your life, how would you answer? It could be the job offer you didn't think you'd get. It could be the pastor, new to your church, who knows just how to explain God's Word in a way that really touches your heart. Or perhaps it's the spouse who, by all hard evidence, is exactly the person you need to provide you with the balance you don't think you need. Or that fellow passenger on the bus who has you pondering whether you should carry a can of pepper spray in your purse, but who gets off three blocks before his stop just to run after you and give you back the keys you dropped when you got off. Maybe it's the strength you didn't know you possessed when called upon to face circumstances for which you could never be prepared.

Look farther, deeper. The hands of God are everywhere: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). Proverbs 30:4 says, "Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!" And finally, Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

That last verse leaves me a little uncomfortable, familiar with my flaws as I am. I don't always feel up to the task of doing the good works he has prepared for me. There are times when I feel like poor handiwork. But Emily Riley in *Devotional Christian* writes, "The Hand that created and sustains the world does not make a mistake in the events of our lives. We can trust his sovereign plan, assured of his care and love for us." And Max Lucado puts it this way: "God's hands draw together the disjointed blotches in our life and render them an expression of his love."

God's hands. At work everywhere. In all of us. We should have no trouble recognizing those nail-scarred hands! An eternal, all-consuming love is written there, a love that spells out our names alongside the wounds. God promises, "I will not forget you...I have carved you on the palm of my hand" (Isaiah: 49:15, 16).

Teresa Boer-Gravelle lives in Hamilton and attends Ancaster CRC.

The nature of sport *continued*

eventually devoured him.

Diagorus displayed arête, attracting praise and honour; Milo was arrogant and dismissive. Yet they both endure in history. What do they have in common?

They both won. Ultimately, we as sport followers love a winner. The excellence and effort required earns our respect, and we desire to relate. When we're young, they fill us with dreams, and when older, they remind us of days gone by. Sport occupies that place in our lives of otherworldly status. It adds to the allure to act as if the outcome matters, though it rarely does. So while we may like admirable athletes, we really like winners. Taking the case of Bubba Watson, one might wonder which is the more powerful attraction, his outspoken faith or his Masters victory? Perhaps an example from another sport will help answer this question. Ask yourself, "Which scenario is more likely to drastically reduce the number of Tim Tebow followers: a public moral collapse like Tiger Woods, or failure as an NFL quarterback?"

Winning in sport is an inherent desire, and it does little good to pretend otherwise. But competition and the desire to win is also fraught with conflict and dangers, prompting the Greeks, Puritans, Victorians, Muscular Christians and the like in history to frame sport as being about more than winning. We love sports so much that we badly want them to develop the virtues we all hold dear. Golf, for instance is said to impart perseverance and honesty: perseverance from trying to tame an eminently difficult game, and honesty from the self-policing aspect of the rules. In golf, there are no referees; competitors call penalties on themselves. For instance, every true golfer has no doubt that if Tiger Woods accidentally moved his ball without being seen, he would call a penalty on himself, displaying unflinching "golf" honesty; yet Tiger lied to his wife for years.

The conundrum of sport is evident. Society and our personal convictions do permeate the other world of sport, and vice versa, but as much as we want to control it, the nexus between the two is mysterious and unpredictable.

Christians realize that in "real life" Bubba and Tiger are more alike than different. Both do good things, both make mistakes and both need a saviour. We can relate to both figures, as humans if not as great golfers. Of course, winning captures and keeps our attention. But like eras gone by, we want athletes to be better than themselves, and we want sport to be better than it is. We want golf to help Tiger be a better person, and we want a seemingly good Christian like Bubba to be rewarded with championships. We want it so badly that sometimes it even happens.

Dr. Brian Bolt is a professor and the chairperson of the Kinesiology Department at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is also Calvin's men's golf coach.

Chuck McMann: shining Jesus' light in professional sports

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Chuck McMann, Special Teams Coordinator with the British Columbia Lions Football Club, helped lead his team to the 2011 Grey Cup Championship win. Prior to that, McMann coached 10 seasons with the Calgary Stampeders in Alberta. His professional football career began years earlier in 1976 when he made the Montreal Alouettes football team and played for 10 years in the Canadian Football League. Recently, *Christian Courier* interviewed McMann about his life as a Christian involved in professional sports.

After the B.C. Lions' 2011 victory, you went to several communities to show the Grey Cup. What response did you receive? What was your goal in bringing it to these places?

After winning the Grey Cup game, I had the privilege to take the Grey Cup to various locations and people. I first shared it with friends and neighbours on our street. Then I took it to Langley Christian School. I'm not sure who was more excited and goofy, the students or the teachers. It was a great blessing. I also made appearances at the #4 Station of the Langley Fire Department, the Langley RCMP detachment, and the Salvation Army Gateway of Hope, where I had the opportunity to prepare and serve dinner to the street people in Langley. This was amazing – just to see the faces and reaction of the underprivileged people who were so excited because they were included. I also took it to Fort Nelson, B.C. It was just after Christmas. We requested that people bring a food donation to the local food bank in order to have their picture taken with the Grey Cup. We took it to the fire station and the RCMP detachment there.

Sharing the Grey Cup with the Fort Nelson Fire Department.

The purpose of taking the Grey Cup around was to share the excitement of winning, but also to share the history and tradition of the Canadian Football League.

When did you become a Christian? Who were your mentors as you grew in your faith and worked in the area of professional football?

I became a Christian in 1975, mainly because of the sharing and example of my girlfriend, Margaret, who is now my wife. I made profession of faith and have been a member of the Christian Reformed Church ever since. After Margaret and I were married and were members of the Montreal Alouettes, there were some very strong and vibrant Christians on the team, especially Pat and Rene Bonnett. Margaret and I were involved with Bible studies, Athletes in Action ("a global sports ministry working with college and professional athletes to use the platform of sport to help people with questions of faith"), and had opportunities to share our faith with others. It was a tremendous time of growth and maturing as Christians for both of us. Wally and Sande Buono, Joe Barnes, Johnny and Beth Evans, and many others were all very influential on our Christian walk and growth. Also, Don and Jeannie

Food Bank Grey Cup fundraiser in Fort Nelson.

Liesemer from Hockey Ministries International had a tremendous impact on the Montreal Alouettes during the 1970s and early 1980s.

As a child involved in sports, did you face extreme pressure to succeed as many children do today?

Growing up, I didn't have a lot of pressure since my parents weren't sport enthusiasts. They did support me, but never pushed me. I never played football until I was 16 years old. I probably would never have played if it hadn't been for a physical education teacher, a football coach, who almost forced me to come out for the team. After the first season of playing, I was hooked and loved to play.

What advice would you give to parents whose children are involved in sports?

If I were to give any advice to parents about their children and athletics, it would be to allow them the opportunity to experience as many different sports as they want to, support and encourage them, but, most of all, allow them to have fun.

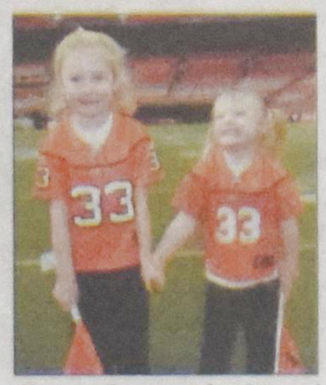
When you speak to children in schools, what do you tell them about the relationship between your Christian faith and professional sports?

God created us all different, with varying talents and gifts. We as his children should develop our gifts, enjoy them and do our best with them, as this is what God wants us to do. Professional sport is nothing more than entertainment for the public. The athletes need to perform, but they still must love and enjoy what they are doing. If they are doing it for the money, they will never be content.

What challenges have you faced as a Christian in professional sports?

The worst part of being a professional athlete is being in the public eye so much. You are always under the microscope and being a Christian increases the pressure because you are also under the microscope of the non-Christians on the team. But all in all, I was truly blessed by God through my career.

What temptations do Christian athletes in general face?



Young fans at the Lions' practice the day before the Grey Cup final.

The temptations for a professional athlete are the same as for the average individual. The only difference is that there are a lot more opportunities to be trapped. Opportunities throw themselves at you. The worst temptation that I see is an overinflated view of self. Professional athletes are no more or less important than the next person. We just have different abilities, gifts, and opportunities that are provided by God.

Have you faced public criticism because of your faith? Have you had to defend yourself to Christians for being a Christian who played professional sports and now coaches it?

I have been criticized because of my faith, more by teammates than I have been in the public. Yes, I have had to defend or at least give explanations of my faith as an athlete or coach. The biggest criticism I get is for working on a Sunday or for being sponsored by alcohol companies. At times, I question the business myself, but I thank the Lord for my wife as she continues to remind me of the influence that I have had and will have on the athletes, coaches, and others in the same business. If I can be a light shining in the world of professional sport, then at the present time I believe I am where the Lord wants me to be.

In your experience, what have Christian athletes contributed to professional sports?

Christian athletes contribute in the example of how they conduct themselves, how they keep priorities in the correct order, how they have the right perspective on their worldview and how they live lives that show that they are Christians first, who happen also to be professional athletes.

What is your view of success in a world so clearly dominated by the need to win?

For me, success is to work hard, to be honest, to treat people with respect because they are made in the image of God, to make sure people know where I am coming from in my faith life and to be available to help wherever I can.

What steps have you taken in your personal life to maintain a balanced approach to sports that leaves time and room for God, family, church, and community involvement? Have you embraced spiritual disciplines in order to remain spiritually healthy?

Personally, I must schedule time with God or I can get totally absorbed in the football world. I start off each day at about 4:30 a.m. in quiet time with God. I need to do this at the beginning of the day as it sets the tone for the rest of the day. If I try to do it at night, I am far too tired. Also, we have a chapel before each game, both at home and on the road. I am blessed to be on a team that has a good number of Christians, both coaches and players. Presently, we are having a Bible study every Wednesday during lunch time with the coaches and Dave Klassan from Athletes in Action. At the present time, just my wife, Margaret, and I live at home; all the kids are grown up and on their own. During the off season we attend Willoughby Christian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C. We are involved with a Home Group, my wife is a deacon and I volunteer at a Salvation Army Centre where I help feed street people.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm not really sure what I will do. Margaret and I are waiting for what God has for us. We went on a short term mission trip last spring to Ecuador to help in orphanages run by For His Children. It was organized through our church, and was an amazing experience. At the present time, my plan is to coach another season and see what God has for us.

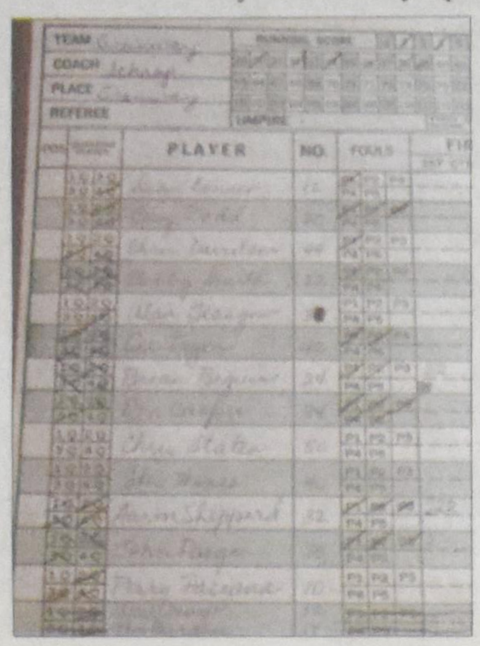
Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.

Swan Song XXXIV– gym rat

James C. Schaap

No faces rise from the pages of this old scorebook. The names are here, game after game, and an embarrassing tally of final scores – we lost far more than we won. But the simple fact that I don't see a one of these players of mine when I read their names, not a single face, is the real story.

Once upon a time, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to be a coach. When, as a college freshman, I met the professor assigned to be my adviser, I put down history as a major, not because I was all that interested in the Civil War but because there was no physical education major at Dordt College in 1966 and the only way I was going to get a chair in a high school gym's coaching office was to have some kind of major to go with the whole coaching thing. I did my high school years in a gym, wore a jock more than underwear, and wanted more of all of that life.



But after two seasons of college basketball, the physical truth became imminently clear – I wasn't as good as I once thought I was. I played baseball for all four college years, however, and when I graduated there was still enough gym rat in me to be thrilled to coach freshmen basketball at Black Hawk High School, South Wayne, WI.

We didn't win much there either. I'm not sure we won at all. And an odd thing happened – I realized I cared much more about A. E. Housman, about "To an Athlete Dying Young," than I did about breaking a zone press. Basketball was fun, but I was no fanatic. That life had simply fallen away like snake skin.

I once shook hands with an opposing coach while I coached hoops in Phoenix. The guy eyed me as if I was some boxer about to climb in the ring with him. I knew what he was doing– he was working at intimidation, and I laughed because I knew at that very moment that I'd never coach again. I just didn't care all that much.

When I found this old scorebook in a file drawer, when I pulled it out and paged through it, no more than a half-dozen memories arose, ghost-like, from its pages. Greenway High School, Phoenix, Arizona – my freshman basketball team. 1975.

Here's one story. I don't see his face anymore, but I remember that one of the kids was tough. He looked tough and he was. Once upon a time in a ball game, a ref called a technical, pointed to him, and then came over to tell me that he just didn't like the kid's looks. I swear that happened. I didn't scream because it probably made sense – the kid did.

Once upon a time I called his father because I must have needed his help. I don't remember having a ton of trouble with the boy, but I probably had enough to call home. Here's what the kid's father said: "Good luck – I haven't been able to do anything with that kid for the last three years."

I loved teaching in the city, but that story became symptomatic of a malaise I attributed to our time and place and public education and Western civilization. How on earth is a teacher supposed to control a kid his father quit on three years ago?

And then there's this. We lost a ton of games, I remember. In fact, when I page through this scorebook, I'm surprised we won at all. After a loss somewhere, we climbed on the bus– we were one-half of the freshman basketball team; there was another team, too – the green and the gold – and another coach, a friend of mine who taught history.

We lost and I was mad at the world. Or just sick of it – I don't know which exactly. Think of it this way, I was un-talkative, maybe even a little surly, just plain tired.

My friend Sam was a good guy. We got along because both of us cared more about the classroom than we did the gym. Anyway, Sam was in the seat behind me, and he started talking to me, not loud, just talking, the guys behind us in the bus jabbering away for fair.

"You know, Schaap, here's what I think – think of it this way," he said, his arms draped over the seat. "The way I see it, sometimes when I feel like that, is that you just gotta remember that there's somewhere close to million people in San Diego, California, who don't really give a shit."

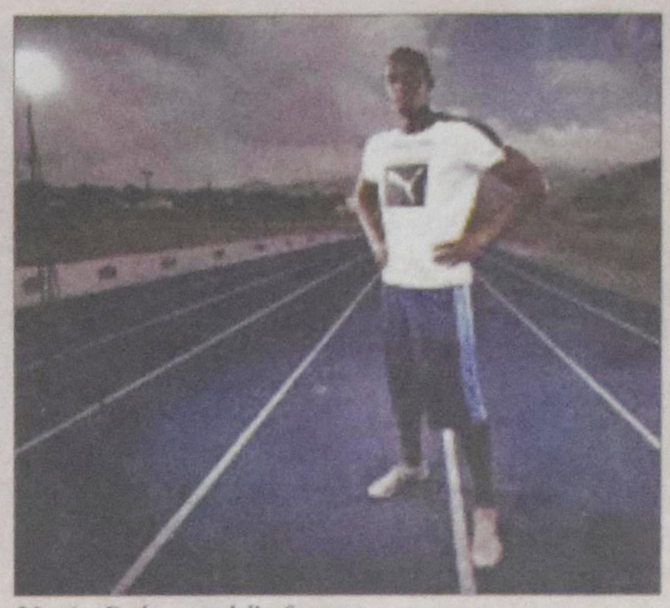
That line will stay with me when this book is long gone. San Diego will always be there when I tell myself that things can't get any worse. Life-long therapy.

Things you don't learn on the court. They call it a classroom. Maybe it is – or was.

Dr. James C. Schaap recently retired after 35 years of teaching at Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa. His various writings (stories, essays, and books) have been around just about as long as he has. He hopes that soon there will be more.

The legs of a man

"His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor his delight in the legs of a man; . . ." Ps. 147:10



Usain Bolt: world's fastest man.

James C. Schaap

The athlete in me is well into the fourth quarter now, time winding down, and the game has slowed dramatically. This morning, I'm typing in my athletic shorts and t-shirt and gym shoes. When my desktop says 5:41, I'll leave for the rec center, where the same folks show up early every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning.

I'll lift weights, get on the steps, then row my way across a torturous imaginary river before heading home, soaked in sweat, the blessed livery of a workout vet. Tonight, if it's nice, I'll take a walk with my wife – almost three miles. Basically, that's what's left for an aging four-sport jock once named the high school's "Athlete of the Year." Years ago, I lost the gold cufflinks.

On Friday, I met a nice, young kid, a senior in high school, who expressed an interest in majoring in English when he gets to college next year. He's thinking about enrolling at the college where I teach, and my job was to sweet talk. Turns out his passion is basketball – that's what he told me. English is okay for a major, but history or math would do the job too, he said. He wants to coach.

Could have been me forty years ago.

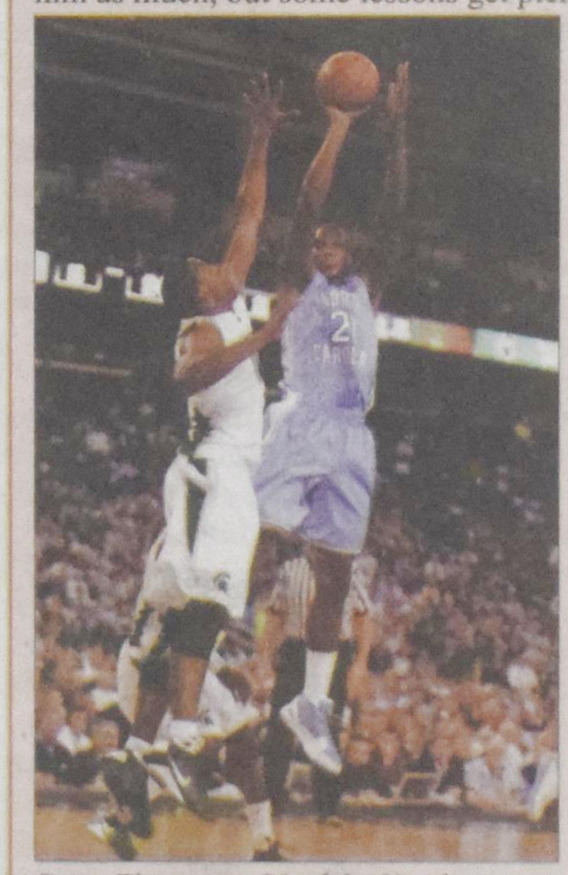
Great kid, sweet kid – I'd love to have him enroll, whether or not he ever pulls on a jersey. But his passion is basketball, he says, eyes ablaze.

He wants to play ball in college, but he knows making the team is no cakewalk. He says a hot shot from his small, Indiana high school came here a few years ago and didn't make the team – so he's says he's prepared.

I told him I've seen guys hamstrung when suddenly they didn't have to turn up for practice every afternoon of their lives, ex-jocks who said they felt as if bright lights had gone out of their lives without the rhythm of after-school practice. I went through that myself – delirium tantrums from no more heavy-laden gym bags. It's identity loss for thousands, millions. Females too.

He said he knew all of that. He said he thought he was prepared. But good night! – does he want to play. Basketball, he told me, more than once, is his passion.

Verse 10 of Psalm 147 is a gift for highly-juiced jocks, a reminder to a million wannabe all-stars that there's more to life than being MVP. Much more. I tried to tell him as much, but some lessons get picked up only by way of experience.



Deon Thompson 21 of the North Carolina Tar Heels takes a jump shot.

This morning, when I left the gym, some lanky grade-school kid was shooting free throws. When he went after the ball, his long legs arched a bit like a pair of fine parenthesis, the sure sign of speed and kinds of athletic gifts. Couldn't help but admire.

But God doesn't really care. The psalmist says God takes no delight in the legs of man, whether or not they're as sharply defined as a thoroughbred's.

That's good to hear, especially when mine are all but gone, my knees a foul nest of hooks. We're not loved for the size of our engines or the thrust of our calves. We're loved, even when we've no more horsepower than an ancient VW bus.

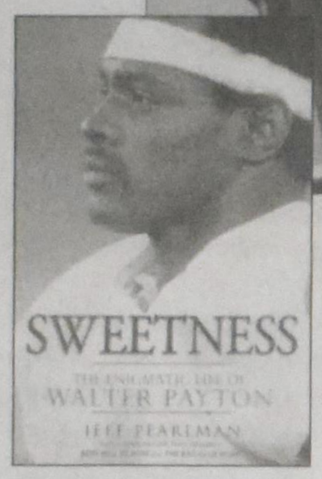
Met a kid last week who told me basketball was his passion. Someday, like all of us, this little verse will bring him comfort, as it does me, an old man who long ago lost his prized cufflinks. It's good to be reminded – at 18 or 58 – that really, God doesn't much care about all of that. Some might, but he doesn't. Bless his holy name.

Note: "The Legs of a Man" is reprinted with permission from *Sixty at Sixty: A Boomer Reflects on the Psalms.*

Features

Walter Payton and the persistence of hero worship

Todd Hertz



Here in Chicago, we have rules - things you just don't do. Among them: You don't put ketchup on a hot dog. You don't call it Cloud Gate; it's "the Bean." And you don't badmouth the beloved Walter Payton.

In this football town, the larger-than-life Super Bowl XX Bears are viewed with an admiration that bleeds into reverence. While all the '85 Bears sit on pedestals, none sits higher than Payton, the sweet-moving Hall of Fame running back who died at only 45. So imagine the reaction last month when *Sports Illustrated* published an excerpt of a then-unreleased biography revealing number 34's darker side: philandering, selfishness, addiction to painkillers, suicidal thoughts and more.

The words of the book's author, Jeff Pearlman, best capture the scene: "As soon as Chicagoans began hearing about the excerpt, they snapped. Word quickly leaked that I had written a Kitty Kelley-esque rip job of Chicago's favourite son....Mike Ditka said he'd spit on me. I received some of the most vile, vicious threats I'd ever read."

Since the release of the book, it's become clear that while the *SI* excerpt capitalized on the book's most shocking revelations, "Sweetness: The Enigmatic Life of Walter Payton" is nothing to fear for fans of Payton. It's not a toxic, "gotcha" tell-all, but a well-researched, fair, honest and comprehensive history. Still, I believe the instant fan resistance exposes something that lingers in us all: a desperate hope for a flawless hero. A desire that led one Chicago reporter to offer this warning: "If you do read [*Sweetness*], you have to be able to accept a harsh reality: Walter Payton wasn't perfect."

It seems elementary to recognize that superb athletic prowess does not equal moral strength. "In the info-glut age, how can anyone be surprised that the most gifted among us have just as many human failings as we spectators and observers?" wrote media observer Dave Fairbank. "To assume [a hero's] personal qualities match their talents is to assume you won't get jolted across the room this time when you slide the screwdriver into the electrical outlet." Still, time and again, we as a culture are shocked when the illusion we build around a hero – actor, politician, artist, athlete, author, etc. – is shattered. As Pearlman has said, "perhaps all fans want is to believe their heroes are only heroes, and nothing else matters."

Why is that?

Fairbank suggests that it's a matter of stake-holding. We make myths out of men because we benefit from the mythmaking. "They want the image to remain clean and pure because they benefit from the culture of hero worship," he writes. "Or they don't want real life compromising their diversions and fantasies."

So why do we need these fantasies? What do we lose if our hero is not perfect?

Maybe we lose, as Fairbank said, our diversion from our own hard lives. We regret that real life rips away at the thing we built as a safe mental vacation.

Maybe we lose the illusion that we can be more. Sometimes, I can sense a deep-down whispering that goes like this: "If Walter Payton – talented, famous, charming and rich – wasn't happy, wasn't perfect, wasn't *better*, then there is no hope for me."

As a Christian, I believe we are hard-wired to long for God. And so maybe this draw to a perfect flawless hero was installed simply to pull us to Christ. But when we mistakenly try to fill that hole with broken humans or institutions, we come up empty.

Interestingly, Christians are not immune to this struggle of reconciling our heroes and their flaws – despite a Holy Scripture full of flawed, broken faith heroes. I have had many conversations with Christians rocked upon discovering Mother Teresa had doubts or that Martin Luther King, Jr. had mistresses or that their pastor has an angry streak. Often, we get angry at that figure for not being what we thought or desired. Or we stick our heads in the sand, ignoring the person's complexity.

But I suggest that we also look inside to why we wanted them to be something more. And maybe apply thoughts from Pearlman about the Payton controversy: "I don't think there's anything wrong with knowing that a person was flawed. Maybe the [shallow] depiction of Walter Payton as a terrific, happy-go-lucky family man is the way to go. But ... is it real?"

Todd Hertz is the E-Marketing Manager for ThinkChristian's parent ministry, ReFrame Media. He is also the general editor of "TheTeenQuest Bible" and reviews film for ChristianityToday.

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Stewardship of sports viewing

Jeff Munroe

The Detroit Lions are good, the Green Bay Packers are great, the Chicago Bears are inconsistent and the Minnesota Vikings are incapable of holding a lead. That's the sports news from the Upper Midwest a few weeks into football season.

I don't know this from the newspaper or the sports station my car radio is tuned to or even from one of the two sports magazines I receive weekly. I know this because I've already spent several hours hunkered down in front of my television watching football. Yes, I have a man cave. There is a flat screen the size of Rhode Island down there with a stereo, surround-sound system, all of which makes it easy to focus on the game and shut out everything else.

There is something wrong with this. I spend too much time and too much money on my addiction. Sports don't really matter and I distract myself from real problems by watching games instead. Plus, my self-esteem should not be tied to the won-loss record of my favorite teams, but I have noticed my mood changing because of what happens on a distant playing field.

But there is something right about this too. The state of Michigan, where I live, has been devastated over the last several years by one economic blow after another. As I write this the Detroit Lions are vastly improved and both the Michigan State and University of Michigan football teams are playing well. Sports are filling the people of Michigan with optimism and hope. It's all made me wonder about the stewardship of sports viewing.

Sports Illustrated recently ran a story entitled "Sports Saves the World," and even though I don't fully endorse that title, I can't help but be encouraged by the stories of people using sports for peacemaking and development. The events captured in the movie *Invictus* also come to mind, when Nelson Mandela used rugby to unite a fractured South Africa. Powerful things happen through sports.

Yet I wonder what Jesus thinks of man caves, couch potatoes, face paint and fantasy leagues. I have a few guesses as to what Jesus might say to us today. What would you add?

I think Jesus would point out that our games sometimes provide transcendent moments, moments where heaven seems to touch earth. I'm thinking of the time in Detroit last summer during a baseball game when an umpire's missed call deprived pitcher Armando Galarraga of an extremely rare perfect game. Galarraga's calm response of acceptance and forgiveness was stunning.

Yes, there are great moments that happen in sports, but I suspect Jesus would add that my hunch about spending too much time in the man cave is correct. I think Jesus would tell me one of the best parts of sports is participating and encourage me to play more and watch less. I think he'd also say that I should monitor my tendency to use sports as a sort of anesthesia to numb out reality and that sports are neither good nor bad, but like many things in life are something we infuse with value. It is up to us to redeem or profane them.

Finally, when it comes to the stewardship of sports viewing, I think Jesus would say that the exhilaration we feel watching a sporting event is a foretaste of the abundant life he promised. There are beautiful moments in sports when we get glimpses of grandeur and majesty. I imagine I hear him saying, "Enjoy those moments, but remember, it's only a game."

And, if I'm not mistaken, I think I hear him whispering, "Go Lions," too. He loves all of us, after all, but he's got a soft spot for underdogs.

Jeff Munroe is a writer and a pastor for the Reformed Church in America.

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Running the Boston Marathon for charity

John de Vries, Jr.

The Boston Marathon is one of the world's best known road racing events, and is held on Patriots' Day (the third Monday of April) every year. Thousands of runners who qualify travel to Boston to take part, and many of these do so in part to raise money for worthy causes. After raising over $22,000 for CRWRC Africa HIV-AIDS programs five years ago, I decided to run the 116th Boston Marathon this year to raise funds for the Church Council on Justice and Corrections (CCJC).

Running for a charity helps provide funds where they are needed most. The CCJC makes justice legislation resources available to Canadian churches, and is supported by the CRC as one of 11 founding denominations. Churches are helped by the CCJC to address justice issues and to correspond with Prime Minister Harper and government officials regarding faith-based justice concerns. CCJC manages 15 Circles of Support and Accountability Demonstration Projects (CoSA). In a time of reduced CCJC funds from the government and churches, one board member asked me "why not raise funds for 'healing justice' when you run the Boston Marathon?"

This year's race began with an extra challenge: heat. With unseasonably high temperatures of 30 C predicted, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino and marathon organizers spoke to runners lined-up for their pre-marathon pasta meal and encouraged first-timers not to run. Experienced runners were cautioned to run carefully, hydrate often, and to pace themselves more slowly. Indeed, by the end of the race 2,100 participants had received medical attention and 4,000 chose to sit out entirely. But despite the high temperature 21,000 marathoners successfully finished the race, and I'm glad to report that I was one of them.

John de Vries recovers after finishing the Boston Marathon in 30 C heat.

While this was the hottest marathon I've ever experienced as a runner, the mayor's pre-race caution helped me slow down my pace. To run for a personal best or place among the top four finishers in my age category (as I did last year) would need to wait for another time. Hydrating enough – but not too much – was a process of "running" a thin line, and I'll admit to walking a little up Heartbreak Hill. But I received a lot of encouragement during the race: I was wearing a Calvin College singlet, and many of the 500,000 spectators along the way cheered me on with shouts of "go Calvin!" Having no medical issues and finishing with a time of 4:06.06 (which was within my qualifying time of 4:10.00) made this a rewarding experience, and fundraising for CCJC was the icing on the cake.

Why run?

Why do people run marathons? My tablemates at the pre-race pasta dinner had a variety of answers. Harry, a 48-year-old Connecticut man said he was running because of what his insurance agent had told him five years ago: that if he lost weight his insurance costs would be substantially reduced. So now, a lighter Harry is running for health and savings. Another couple at the table, Ed and Jacqueline from Minnesota, were running because she had run well in high school and university. When they got married Ed began running too, and now they do marathons together.

For me, running is a way of life. I ran my first marathon at age 49, and this year was my 18th Boston Marathon. My three sons would rather that I'd bought a red sports car to deal with my mid-life issues. But I chose to run, so long as it doesn't interfere with work or family life. Running makes the body more efficient, reduces sleep time, and provides me with a daily high at no medical cost and with no harmful side affects. Each marathon is a challenge and a new adventure.

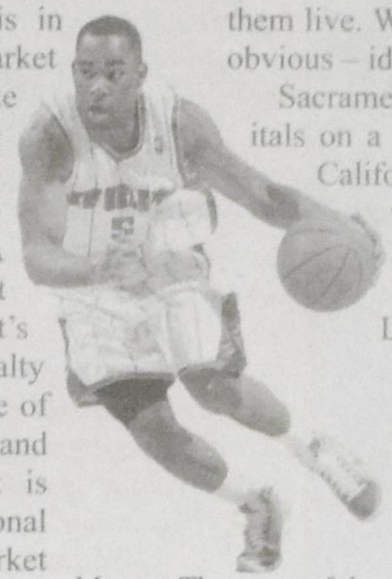
Whether climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro for Just-Equipping (as I did in January – see *CC* March 12), running a marathon or participating in any other sport activity (walking, swimming, etc.), most people can remain healthy and raise funds for kingdom and community causes. Whether a person is 17 or 71 years old, there are always opportunities to make a fundraising difference while staying physically fit and saving the tax-payers healthcare dollars.

Rev. John de Vries, Jr. is a retired CRC chaplain who has worked for Correctional Services Canada (CSC) and served as Regional Coordinator of Chaplaincy Services Ontario. He is currently employed part-time as the Canadian CRC Restorative Justice Coordinator, serves as vice-president of the CCJC and represents the CRC on the Federal Interfaith Committee of CSC.

Post-season dreams

Paul VanderKlay

The NBA post-season is in full swing. A few large market teams with superstars like LeBron and Kobe battle with some scrappy small market teams like San Antonio and Indianapolis. The NBA doesn't highlight the market dynamics of their sport, it's supposed to be about loyalty for your team, but the move of LeBron James from Cleveland to Miami reinforces what is often unspoken. Professional sports are a business and market size means everything.



Marcus Thornton of the Sacramento Kings.

The Sacramento Kings aren't in the post-season. They haven't been since 2006. In 2011 the big news was the desire of the Kings' majority owners, the Maloof family, to move the team to Anaheim, into the megalopolis of Southern California, to become the third NBA team in that region.

This has created lots of media drama. Pressure from the NBA and promises from the mayor of Sacramento, former NBA star Kevin Johnson, generated one final chance for Sacramento to replace its mediocre arena (too few luxury boxes) with a state-of-the-art downtown palace. Over the course of the year the stakeholders worked together and reached a deal by the deadline established by the NBA. The deal is, of course, all about the money. These deals are made and lost on details that few of us pay much attention to – rent, concessions, parking, sales tax, etc.

Sacramento is a city still reeling since the housing bubble burst. Although not yet bankrupt, each year the city lays off more firefighters, police and parks employees and cuts back city services further. Some in the town see keeping the Kings as vital for the city's future. Others see it as a pointless distraction, the last place the city should pour in hundreds of millions of dollars. Many in the debate see the trade-offs as a binary choice: will we expend precious resources for services to poor children and seniors, or will we build an amusement centre for the wealthy who can afford the high ticket prices (fourth highest in the NBA) to watch millionaire athletes play for the profit and glory of the beer and gambling moguls?

Days after the deal was announced, it fell apart, putting the future of the Kings in Sacramento in jeopardy once again. The Maloofs backed out because they wanted a better deal. Meanwhile, Seattle, who lost the Sonics to Oklahoma City, their old team now contending for the title, wants back into the NBA club. Anaheim, too, still wants the Kings.

Reflected Selves

As I watched the debate I had to ask myself, why do we want the Kings to stay so badly? Many of those campaigning to keep the team can't afford the tickets to watch them live. What is it about? The answer is obvious – identity.

Sacramento is one of those state capitals on a lower tier. The urban stars of California, Los Angeles (all the way down to the border) and the San Francisco Bay area are world-renowned. Former Lakers coach Phil Jackson dismissively called Sacramento "cow town." I regularly hear Charles Barkley on TNT make snide comments about my city. If Sacramento loses the Kings, all of this will stop, but sometimes even negative attention is better than no attention at all. People can't see themselves. So we use the things and the people around us in this world as mirrors to see ourselves. We do this as individuals, and we do this as groups. Many in Sacramento are happy to pay more than this poor city can afford to stay in the validating media spotlight, even for negative attention, just so that we won't cease to exist. Is Sacramento like that abused child or spouse who would rather suffer insult than neglect?

Sometimes sports operate like a less destructive methadone for the heroin of human conflict as a platform for identity exaltation. That is such a pity because sports can be beautiful and life-giving. Sports can challenge us to develop our God-given bodies, and to develop the subtle and elegant communities called teams. Sports can challenge us to push harder, faster and higher than we thought we could.

If Sacramento loses its team (lured here in 1985 from Kansas City), it won't stop trying to build a new, attractive arena with money it doesn't have. Because of relocation, the NBA is filled with teams whose names make no sense: the Lakers in California, a state bereft of natural lakes, the Grizzlies in Memphis, the Jazz in Utah. There are also lots of small market franchises that will always be cellar-dwellers, but who hang on because fans need the validation of a top tier professional team in their town. These teams won't be able to hold budding superstars because the endorsement deals in the big markets will always make the most sense for their careers. These things likely won't change.

I believe we will have sports in the age to come, sans its idolatry. I believe we will have sports fans in the age to come celebrating the exaltation of the Creator through the gifts of creation. I believe we will receive our identities from something larger and purer than an entertainment business and I believe we will enjoy it to our very cores.

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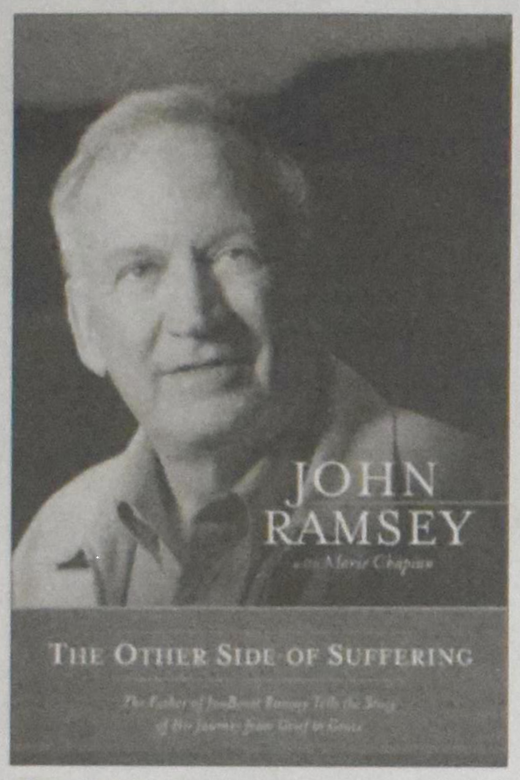
Reviews

A journey through suffering



The Other Side of Suffering: The Father of JonBenet Ramsey Tells the Story of His Journey from Grief to Grace by John Ramsey, with Marie Chapian. Faith Words, 2012.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Into his 30s, John Ramsey "was under the misconception that life was supposed to be comfortable, that we were meant to be free from pain and suffering" (32). The prosperous bubble in which he existed soon burst and left him with the surprising realization that human relationships and material comforts can be taken away from us in a heartbeat and that the life we once knew can be gone forever. He reflects, "Wasn't it just this morning I woke up as president of a thriving company, two nice cars in the garage, a boat in the marina, an airplane in the hangar? Wasn't it just this morning we were all alive and enjoying breakfast in our home?" (41)

Ramsey's numerous calamities bring to mind the biblical Job who lost family and fortune, and who cursed the day he was born (Job 3:1-10). Divorced from his first wife with whom he had three children, Ramsey later married Patsy, and they had two children. In 1992, his eldest daughter Beth was killed in a car accident. Four years later, his six-year-old daughter JonBenet was murdered in their home. Ramsey discovered her body in the basement of their house.

The police in their hometown of Boulder, Colo., immediately suspected that the Ramseys were guilty of the murder. Consequently, the media maligned and harassed the Ramseys for years, though many professional investigators asserted that they were innocent. Though they were never officially called suspects by the police, "without the smallest shred of evidence, the media and popular opinion were being manipulated by the police to convict us in the court of public opinion" (page 26). Years later, their names were cleared by Mary T. Lacy in the Office of the District Attorney. JonBenet's murderer is still at large.

As a result of the steep cost of legal battles and poor decision making under duress, the Ramseys faced financial ruin.

Then, in 2006, John Ramsey endured another blow when Patsy died of ovarian cancer.

Ramsey admits that at the beginning of his traumatic odyssey when Beth died, his faith, based on the notion that "God would bless and protect me if I followed the rules," was "empty and insignificant" (61). It was then that he began to seriously examine his faith and grow in a biblically rooted relationship with God. Many "why" questions continued to batter his life. He clung to God and began to realize that "what I needed was to really understand God and what he promised, and what he didn't promise" (69). He wants readers to glean a most important truth from his book, namely, "that tragedy doesn't have to damage our souls. I realize only too well that I could spend the rest of my life bitter, wounded, grieving, sad, angry – but these emotions lead nowhere. I must believe that God, in his kind, gentle, and caring manner, is right beside me, guiding and loving me through the extreme pain I've been subject to" (106-7).

Ramsey writes about more than his faith journey. He offers concrete advice for people who have suffered traumas of various kinds. Here's some of what he suggests. Put your life on hold for as long as necessary and don't make any major decisions during that time. Accept that your decision making ability may be impaired because of trauma. Ask a trusted friend to help you make decisions when you are unable to do so yourself. Get strong legal counsel if your tragedy involves the legal system. Get involved in something that you are passionate about in order to find healing by giving to others. Maintain your time alone with God and seek him always. Take care of your body by continuing to eat well, sleep enough, and exercise. Finally, don't turn people away who are trying to help you through your grief.

Ramsey's story offers encouragement to those who have suffered tragedy and hope to those who struggle with a fledgling faith in God even as they flounder in adversity. He affirms that God is the architect of our lives, even though we don't always understand his building plans.

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Your neighbor's hymnal

Your Neighbor's Hymnal: What Popular Music Teaches Us about Faith, Hope and Love by Jeffrey F. Keuss, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011.

Nick Schuurman

John Cassian, meet Elton John.

Jeffrey F. Keuss, Professor and Associate Dean at Seattle Pacific University, has, in *Your Neighbour's Hymnal*, suggested the the life and writings of the former have a surprising lot to do with the latter. Specifically, he argues that the experience of listening to the likes of "Tiny Dancer" parallels an ancient pattern of mysticism, seen most clearly in the life and writings of Cassian and the 16th century mystic St. John of the Cross.

The pattern consists of three movements of the soul. Purgation – the process of being emptied of that which lacks purpose, meaning and depth – has a sort of auditory equivalent, Keuss suggests, in those moments where one becomes "lost in a song." What follows is a time in which monastics would commit to learning the paths of holiness as revealed in Scripture, making sense of them in relation to the community around them. This Illumination, as it is called, takes place in the journey of the sonic mystic, when, after that initial experience, the listener moves beyond themselves, purchasing more of the artist's albums, going to shows and following tours. Finally comes "unity," the movement of the soul in which one's life becomes bound to others in the context of community. This, Keuss suggests, takes place with the likes of live performances, when, gathered together and moved by the music, the individual, the other, and the sound are welded together.

What Keuss has done, with *Your Neighbour's Hymnal* is something akin to the cultural exegeses of James K. A. Smith's *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith's most striking illustration of the fundamentally spiritual – or liturgical as he prefers to call it – nature of all cultural activity is his comparison of the architecture, practices, and ethos of a typical North American shopping centre to that of a church. Keuss, while he has chosen instead to liken listening to Elliot Smith through headphones to the experience and practices of a Carmelite monk, has served to continue that discussion, and contribute new insights to it. His suggestion that the ubiquity of iPods is a mark of spiritual hunger, for example, is a particularly striking and urgent reminder for the church.

Still, while I would not dispute that the local classic rock station plays songs no less spiritually informed and significant than the "faith-based" programming being broadcast a few digits down in the FM dial, and while I would agree that listening, singing along, attending concerts, and purchasing MP3s are no less acts of faith than what takes place in sanctuaries Sunday mornings, I am hesitant to use the language of mysticism as Keuss has. It serves its purpose in exposing and explaining the religious nature of cultural practices involving popular music, but to what extent does that diminish the uniqueness, and particular urgency of congregational life, spiritual disciplines and monastic traditions? When we call the modern remix of The Jackson 5's "ABC" a "truly sacramental engagement," as Keuss does, how does that shape our understanding of the means of grace that the church has traditionally practiced?

To his credit, Keuss, unlike so many academics, has not been holed up in his office parsing obscure Greek nouns (that is not to say *Your Neighbour's Hymnal* suffers from a lack of accuracy or scholastic credibility); the book is, in a very real sense, pastoral. In its introduction, Kuess – who has himself served within the context of congregational ministry – suggests that the studies could prove helpful within the context of church groups (who, if we are honest, are, more often than not, more conversant in the language of Top 40 than that of the Christian scriptures). His most basic premise, reflected most clearly in the book's title, is that the categories of faith, hope, and love are not exclusive to Christianity. To "read" our neighbour's hymnal – in its most current form of iPod playlists, Youtube music videos, mainstream and independent radio stations – is to be reminded that everyone believes in something, and has desires, hopes, and visions of what a good life consists of that shape their lives.

While I am not sure what the world needs is yet another litany of pop culture exegeses, there is something worth gleaning from this slim volume. Keuss has, with both encyclopaedic detail and pastoral insight, put together playlist for the modern hymnal, exposing in its evolving pages a desire for, and outworking of faith, hope and love.

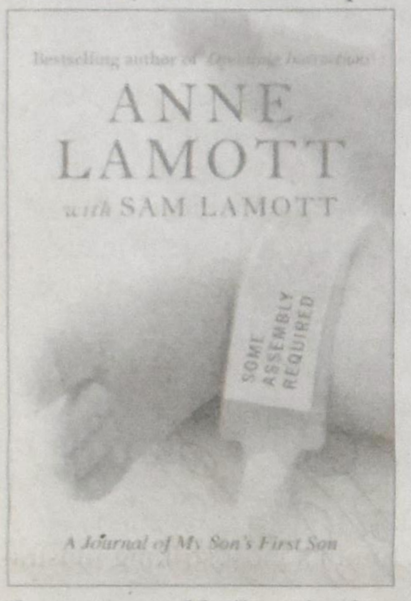
This review first appeared in *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture.*

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) is CC's reviews editor.

On becoming a grandparent: a memoir

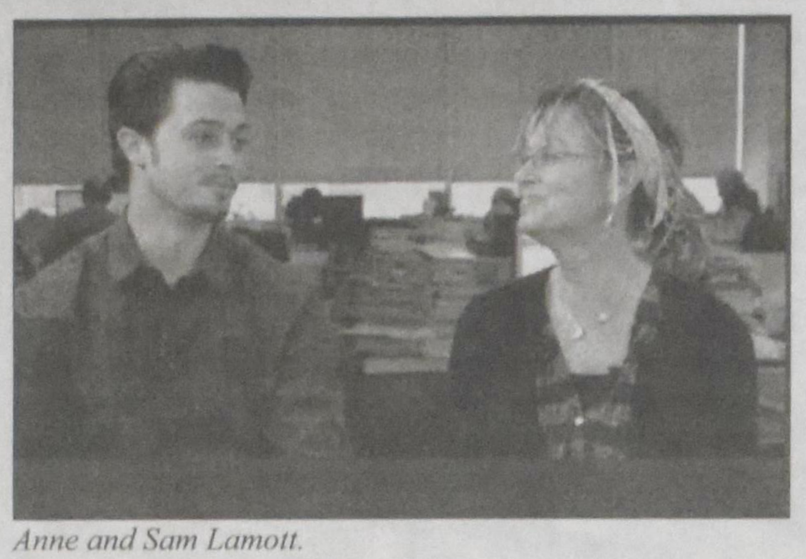
Anna Visser

Anne Lamott is known for her dry humour, sarcastic comments and quirky wisdom regarding faith, family and her own life. She is ever anxious, hilarious and honest, relating stories of her church, friends and family as they constantly remind her what it means to be a Christian. In general, Lamott's words are readable and relatable, like a conversation with a good friend about the things that matter most. Her newest book, *Some Assembly Required: A Journal of My Son's First Son,* is no different. Her voice, perhaps, is softened somewhat by the inevitable awestruck love of a brand new grandparent, but the honesty and wisdom remains.



Some Assembly Required: A Journal of My Son's First Son by Anne Lamott. New York, NY: Riverhead Hardcover, 2012.

The memoir relates the first year of Lamott's grandson Jax's life, and is made up of her own journal entries, as well as emails and conversations with her son Sam, his girlfriend Amy and other family members and friends as they all revel and worry over Jax. Lamott wrote a similar book when Sam was a child, called *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year*, and the new book serves as a sort of sequel. In the preface to *Some Assembly Required*, written by Sam, he acknowledges how important *Operating Instructions* is to him; when he reads it, he says, "I hear and *feel* my mother's love for me, her frustration and dedication,



Anne and Sam Lamott.

her innermost feelings and favorite moments of my first year with her." To his own son he says, "when you read this one day, I want you to know the love, laughter, and endless messes of the most memorable, astonishing, and incredible year of your mother's life and mine so far.... I wanted you to have a book like *Operating Instructions* that is all your own." This is a book about parenting, grandparenting, and family, and about learning selfless love.

Because Sam is only 19 when Jax is born, and because he was brought up by Anne, the journal entries that make up *Some Assembly Required* are full of loving anxiety. Both Sam and Anne worry incessantly about Jax. Sam thinks the baby is probably going to die every time he so much as coughs, and Anne worries that Amy and Jax will move to Chicago to be closer to her family. Anne worries that the baby will be baptized in Chicago and not in her church, and she worries about Sam and Amy's relationship.

So they all have to learn to trust – that the baby won't inadvertently suffocate himself; that, like anyone else, Sam and Amy will learn how to parent and to give up a little bit of control. Lamott says, at the end of her grandson's first year, that he's grown, and "He's grown me, too: grandchildren grow you. With your own child, you're fixated on the foreground, trying to keep the child safe and alive. But with a grandchild, you can be in softer focus, you can see beyond the anxious foreground." This book is an exercise in seeing from a different perspective, in being and becoming human, and understanding what that means. For Lamott, watching a brand new human develop helps her to see how she, too, is still developing.

As part of the process of learning to trust, Lamott struggles with allowing Amy to take Jax to Chicago, and believing that they will come home again. She also forces herself to take some time away, travelling first to India, then on a book tour around the United States and finally to Europe. In India Lamott learns that she can't fix every problem; on tour she learns to take care of herself, and in Europe, to enjoy beauty. Lamott has said before that the two most important prayers for a Christian are "Thank you" and "Help me." In her first year of grandparenthood, she learns another: "What ev."

That's the value of this book. It's full of cute stories and funny moments; there is some tedium at Lamott's incessant worry, and some intrigue about her world travels, but there is also great wisdom – for parents, for grandparents, and for Christians. Lamott shows us all how to see past the anxiety, to learn to say "what ev."

Lamott has one final piece of wisdom. In a letter to Jax, she tells him: "I know exactly one other thing that I hope will be useful: that when electrical things stop working properly, 90 percent of the time you can fix them by unplugging the cord for two or three minutes. I'm sure there is a useful metaphor here." I'm sure she's right.

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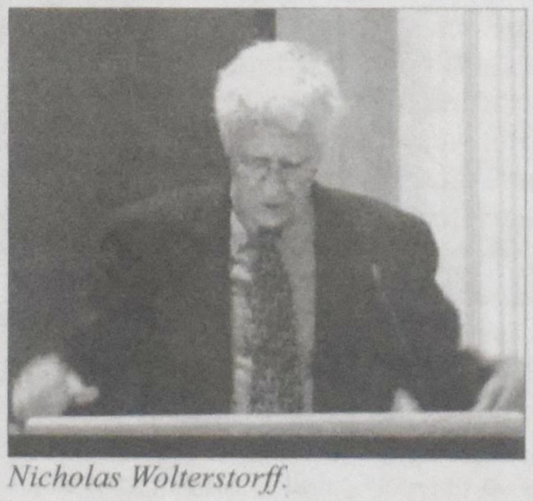
Christian philosophers get people talking about human rights

Spencer Boersma

Folder: check. Time schedule: check. Pen that proudly sports the Emmanuel College insignia: check. Tag that says, "Hello, my name is Spencer Boersma": check. It looked like I was ready to attend as a participant observer of sorts to one of western culture's foremost intellectual rituals, the conference. This conference in particular was put on by the Institute of Christian Studies' new Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics (CPRSE), partnering with Emmanuel College. The event was held on April 27–28, and was attended by about 200 people.

"Kathy Vandergrift said to me, 'We need to get people talking about human rights,' and that was how this conference came together," Lambert Zuidervaart, professor and director of CPRSE, said to me over lunch. In other words, the conference was integrative, meaning it was meant to get philosophers, human rights practitioners, and religious leaders talking together. The first keynote address was given by the esteemed Christian philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff, on the subject of justice and rights. He argued with eloquence and precision that there is no secular account for the innate dignity of the individual, ultimately. Human rights arose in the Western world not through the natural principles of Enlightenment reason, but from the doctrine that all people were made in the image of God, and thus are all entitled to dignity. "Injustice," he stated, "is indignity." These were bold statements to say to such a mixed audience, but it was warmly received. After a round table discussion between representative speakers from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (some were disappointed that no Hindu or Buddhist representatives were present), one audience member, Bruce Porter – a human rights worker and presenter at the conference – asked in excitement, "How can we secular human rights workers enlist the help of religious communities?!" If the conference's sole mission was to get people talking, the conference's mission was accomplished.



Nicholas Wolterstorff.

The conference offered many plenary sessions on topics such as forgiveness, disability, women's rights, poverty and environmentalism, which on the whole, as the conference intended, seemed to be more for the specialists. "A lot of it was over my head," said Hylee Jo, a graduate student in a Master of Theological Studies in Development degree at Wycliffe College, "but what I understood was profound and thought provoking." While many practitioners were pleased at the profound thoughts, some came expecting more practicality, such as Salome Winston, a former missionary, now student and Christian abolition worker: "Other conferences offered 'How-To' seminars for everyone: teachers, aid workers, pastors, students, etc. This conference felt more like classroom lectures, which were great but not what I expected."

There were a lot of expectations for this conference, but there was one expectation that thoroughly delivered. This was the engaging insight offered by Nicholas Wolterstorff, whose lectures easily outshone the others. His final lecture on the Friday proved to just as provocative as his morning address. He spoke on the topic of whether justice and love are at odds. Western society is founded on the Greek notion of justice and the Judeo-Christian notion of love and justice. It is only in the Christian tradition that the two are necessary to one another. Clearing up the old caricature that the New Testament's love supersedes the harsh justice of the Old (which fundamentally makes it sound like the Old Testament God is different from Christ) Wolterstorff, displaying his full multi-talented specialties in biblical studies, theology, and philosophy, did every Christian (and non-Christian) in that room a great service in showing that the God of the whole Bible, Old and New, sees justice and love as one. This conference showed the promise of the new Centre to offer Christian intellectual leadership in the public sphere.

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Columns

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

Social conservation and social justice

One of the late Chuck Colson's final political efforts was the Manhattan Declaration, co-written with Princeton University's Robert George, a Roman Catholic, and Beeson Divinity School's Timothy George, a Southern Baptist. The Manhattan Declaration was published in late 2009 and has been signed by more than half a million supporters since then. It focuses on three significant issues: life, marriage and religious liberty.

The Declaration recognizes that scripture commands us "to defend those who cannot defend themselves, to speak for those who cannot themselves speak. And so we defend and speak for the unborn, the disabled, and the dependent." Human beings are created in the image of God and thus must be protected at every stage of development – from the womb to the final stages of life when physical and mental ability may be diminished. Freedom of choice should not be expanded at the expense of the most vulnerable amongst us. Thus we cannot afford to abandon the unborn to the current abortion licence.

With respect to marriage, the Declaration affirms it to be "the first institution of human society – indeed it is the institution on which all other human institutions have their foundation." Marriage is "a covenantal union of husband and wife" and cannot be redefined to satisfy those with power and influence. Marriage is not primarily about satisfying adult desires and aspirations but about providing a stable environment for nurturing future generations. Healthy marriages benefit everyone, including the partners themselves, children and the larger society. An eroding culture of marriage multiplies social pathologies, including out-of-wedlock births, divorce and various forms of delinquency. The quest for sexual freedom has come with a steep price, which everyone must pay over the long term.

There is an integral connection between the first two issues and the third: religious liberty. Those who would advance sexual freedom and the redefinition of marriage are by no means reluctant to compel others to approve and support their agendas against the dictates of their own conscience. After a Massachusetts court legalized same-sex marriage in that state, Catholic Charities reluctantly ended its longstanding effort to facilitate adoption of orphaned children rather than be forced to place children with same-sex couples in violation of church teachings. According to the Declaration, "Restrictions on the freedom of conscience or the ability to hire people of one's own faith" or moral convictions undermine "the viability of the intermediate structures of society."

Social justice

Here is where the Declaration might well have raised the issue of social justice, a concept with increasing appeal to young people, especially in the churches. Social justice advocates are famously concerned with helping the poor, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged. They commendably have a heart for the homeless, single mothers, refugees and others at the margins of

The late Charles Colson speaks at a press conference announcing the release of the Manhattan Declaration

society. There is ample biblical support for such concern. The Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, singles out three groups for special protection: the widows, the orphans and the sojourners (e.g., Exodus 22:21-22; 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:17-19). The prophets reiterate these laws defending those unable to defend themselves (Isaiah 1:17; Jeremiah 22:3). Israel's failure to keep them led God to exile them from the Promised Land.

Within the larger Christian community there is a seemingly intractable cleavage between social conservationists, who seek to maintain respect for such basic institutions as marriage and family, and social justice advocates, who seek public policy reforms to help the poor. These different emphases pit the likes of Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council against Sojourners and the Emergent Church leaders. Each side thinks the other's agenda is a distraction from the real issues.

But what if it turns out that effective social justice is itself dependent, not just on good intentions and government largesse, but on healthy, functional marriages, families, churches and other communities. My former colleague Gideon Strauss has aptly defined social justice as "the civil society counterpart [of political justice] – nonpolitical organizations that promote justice." If this is correct – and I believe it is – then social conservationists and social justice advocates should be working together, defending life, marriage and religious liberty, including faith-based organizations differing from the ethos of the secular mainstream, in recognition of the central role the institutions of civil society play in the alleviation of poverty in our communities. It's time to call a truce and work together for sake of God's kingdom.

David T. Koyzis teaches politics at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ont. and has recently completed a book manuscript on authority, office and the image of God.

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer

Learning to fail

I am sitting in my office, desk obliterated by stacks of final essays – roughly 150 if I stopped to count them, so I don't. I take a deep breath and decide to check my email before plunging into weeks of marking. Five new messages appear in my inbox, all with a familiar end-of-term theme: "Hi! My name is _____. I'm sorry I missed my final presentation. I know it was worth 25 percent of my grade, but I was home for the weekend and missed my bus back to the college, LOL. I have no car, so I couldn't drive, and anyway the weather wasn't great. I wasn't able to complete my final essay either because I had a bad cold. I know I haven't attended many classes this term, I've just been really busy. What can I do to pass? Cheers, _____."

This familiar scenario is, in a way, the dark underbelly of my topic from last month. I wrote about the desire to protect one's children – my drive to protect my child – from a world with standards too high and compassion too lean. I assume this drive is God-given, assurance that children, at least ideally, have two people solidly in their corner. But there is a flip side to parental protectiveness as virtually anyone in a teaching profession can tell you. In the Ontario college system where I work, I have heard it referred to as "helicopter parenting" and its by-product, the "millennial generation." These terms arise from the frustrations many teachers face as they deal with young people raised to expect maximum reward for minimal effort.

The "millennials" have many strengths – incredible proficiency with technology among other things – but also weaknesses that easily provoke ridicule. A conference speaker I heard several years ago harshly described them as a generation with more confidence than talent. They were typically born to educated, older parents who sheltered them and raised them to feel special and deserving. And although these are generalizations, it is not uncommon to have a millennial student in my office who is genuinely shocked that her mediocre work received a mediocre grade; there seems to be an expectation that simply having completed an assignment is enough. I can even count on a few individuals each term to assume that, having paid their tuition, they will pass the course, even if they've never turned up at class or submitted work.

I recently heard a speaker on TV discussing the roots of some of these problems. He described a modern social paradigm of teaching kids to feel good about themselves without teaching them the hard work of accomplishment worth feeling good about. His example was an endless array of trophies and ribbons given in sporting events to children in second, third or last place. In an effort to be inclusive, to make all children feel good about all aspects of their abilities, have we unwittingly been celebrating underachievement and failing to encourage excellence?

Five months into my parenting journey, all I'm doing is back-seat driving. But as a spiritual child being parented into maturity by my heavenly Father, I know there is a fine line between his approval of my identity and his pruning of my behavioural deadfall. Sometimes the Lord allows me to fail, as much as I resist it, because failure forces me toward humility and resilience – spiritual fruit these gnarled branches don't seem to grow in any other way. As the TV speaker went on to say, success is fragile while effort has a certain toughness to it. I want to mature into that kind of toughness, an established perennial able to take a good trimming, able to appreciate my unique beauty. How

Have millenials been so overprotected by their parents that they feel entitled to success without working for it?

will I see my own strengths if I never face my weaknesses through failure? And how will I recognize the strengths of others if I believe I possess all qualities myself?

The difficulty here is not in theorizing but in walking. I think of Robert Frost's less-travelled path, the barely perceptible road threading narrowly through lush lands of ego and ease. How can I teach my daughter to strive for excellence, not for perfection, a fine line I too need to learn? In Colossians, Paul tells us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men…" (3:23, NIV). Is this the secret: to do my work with my heart, not my ego, to see the hand of the Lord in my work, however mundane? God's presence in it makes all work worthy of effort, and excellence comes through much effort. Father, prune back my ego so I can see your presence burgeoning through all my tasks. Let me learn to fail well so I can strive humbly for excellence.

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. Her guilty pleasure this month is Suzanne Collins' Hunger Games *trilogy.*

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides

Review of *Marked For Death: Islam's War Against the West and Me*

The title of Geert Wilders' book announces that he is "marked for death." Who is this man living under the shadow of death? What did he do to deserve such outrage that he now must live as a fugitive in his own country, the Netherlands – a country that prides itself in being tolerant and freedom-loving? Here is a short list of the things that Wilders notes about his life:

- He received his first death threat in September 2003, after he asked the Dutch government to investigate, and if necessary close down, the al-Furcan mosque in Eindhoven.
- "Wilders, you are a dead man. We are going to cut your head off." (Anonymous, at the time he decided to sit as an independent in the Tweede Kamer.)
- In October 2004 a video appeared on the internet demanding that Wilders be decapitated. On Nov. 2, 2004, filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered on an Amsterdam street and two days later Wilders wrote: "everything changed … and I lost my freedom and became a political prisoner in my own country."
- Former Amsterdam police chief Joop van Riessen said this about Wilders during a televised debate in October 2007: "Basically, one would feel inclined to say: let's kill him, just get rid of him now and he will never surface again."
- Even before Wilders' film *Fitna* (showing verses of the Koran calling for violence against non-Muslims and footage of terrorist attacks) on March 27, 2008, he was threatened with death. Several Dutch Islamic organizations and individuals lodged criminal complaints against him for inciting hatred, discrimination and "group insult." Gerard Spong, a leading Dutch lawyer, offered to represent Wilders' critics free of charge.
- Threats against Wilders and the Netherlands poured in from across the Islamic world. An al Qaeda-linked website announced that Wilders should be killed. Leaders of major Dutch corporations were investigating whether Wilders could be held personally responsible for their losses in the event of an Arab boycott.

Shooting the messenger

And so it went. Even Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and the European Union condemned Wilders for showing *Fitna*. The EU warned "that it will serve no other purpose than inflaming hatred."

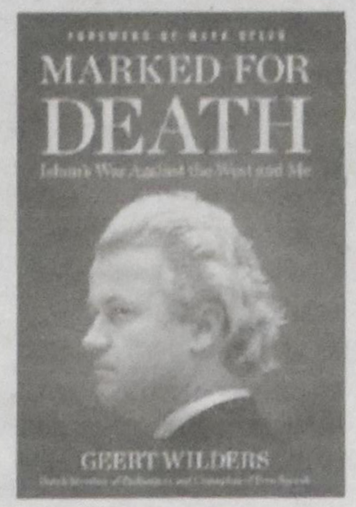
Wilders' troubles only got worse. He was faced with numerous legal cases about *Fitna*. One of the cases was filed by Sheikh Fawaz Ineid, who had cursed Theo van Gogh and asked Allah to make him suffer in a sermon a few weeks before van Gogh was murdered. The Sheikh had also cursed Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a colleague of Wilders, "imploring Allah to give her brain and tongue cancer."

In June 2008, the public prosecutor's office in Amsterdam decided that Wilders would not be prosecuted for *Fitna* or any other statement about Islam and the Koran. It explained that statements may be hurtful and offensive to Muslims but they are not of a punishable nature.

Many objected publicly, including Mohamed Rabbea of the GreenLeft Party who compared Wilders' attitude toward Muslims to the Nazis' persecution of Jews. In January 2009, the Court of Appeal in Amsterdam ordered a retrial. This began on Jan. 20, 2010 in the Criminal Court in Amsterdam after many delays, including the disqualifying of the first panel of judges, and on June 23, 2011 this Court acquitted Wilders of all charges of hate speech.

A bitter irony

This was a major victory for freedom of speech in the Netherlands, but it did nothing to restore Wilders' personal freedom and living conditions. He still lives like a prisoner in his own country. For that to change, a far more drastic change is needed in the Netherlands.



Marked for Death, with a foreword by Mark Steyn, provides the reader with a close-up look at the impact of the Islamic immigration into Europe – first of all in the Netherlands, but also in France, Germany, Belgium, and Britain. It describes the creeping, often criminal expansion of Islamic influence, notably in the so-called "no-go" zones in many neighbourhoods where the authorities refuse to enforce the law of the land.

There are heartbreaking stories of long-time Dutch residents who helplessly watch their once-safe neighbourhoods becoming rundown and unsafe, as for example, in Kanaleneiland, a suburb of Utrecht. The same thing is happening all over Europe.

This is an excellent, clearly written warning against the Islamization of the Netherlands and all of Europe. Wilders is the messenger bringing the bad news. For that he is demonized and forced to live like a prisoner in his own country.

There is a bitter irony here. The very fact that Wilders now lives with a fatwa of death on his head proves his point that Islam is not a religion of peace, as its apologists claim, but one of power and violence.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ont.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

Always surprises at calving time

It's a pretty sight this time of the year as beef cows and their calves graze on lush green grass in pasture fields. The calves are so cute. Seeing cows and calves is becoming a rare sight as more and more beef farmers are exiting the business, ploughing up their fields and growing grain crops. At one time every farm in my neighbourhood had either beef or dairy cattle. That was the norm all over eastern Ontario. Beef farming is a tough business and that's why many farmers in their 60s and early 70s want their remaining farming years to be a little easier. And so rough pasture fields that have never been ploughed up before are now growing soybeans, corn or wheat.

I enjoy having a herd of beef cattle. I've got perfect fences and cattle never break out. I don't have to chase them, as they have to go inside a barn to drink. They are easy to separate with swinging gates everywhere. Having been around cattle all my life I'd sure miss them, even though cattle can be frustrating and noisy when weaning (separating) the calves from the cows. Cows and calves bawl for three days. Three days of blaring!

It takes a lot of patience raising cattle, especially when twins are born and the mother rejects one calf. Last year a Red Angus cow would not take her perfectly normal and frisky calf. The calf found a new mom (cow) and did well. I saw other calves steal from the "new mom" who had lots of milk. It's great when there's such a special mom. It doesn't always happen. In fact, I have a bag of milk replacer on hand in case I have to bottle feed a newborn. It's not a job I enjoy.

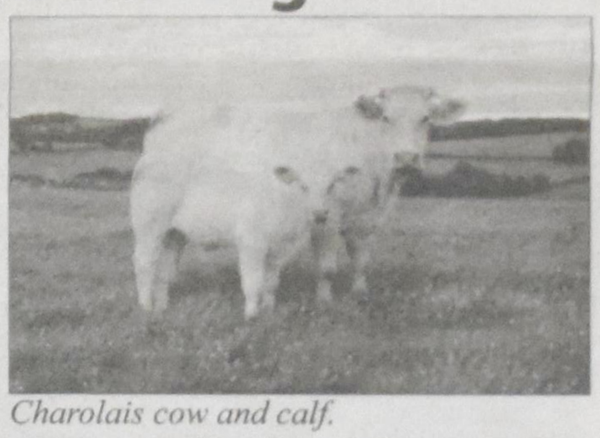
One morning about six weeks ago I checked the expectant cows and saw that a Charolais cow had calved. She was fussing over a red calf. Nearby was a blaring small tan coloured calf sitting nicely on thick bedding. The mother wouldn't even look at the calf. A cow just given birth licks the calf clean and thereby bonds with it. I checked the other expectant cows and saw no one else had calved. It meant that the cow had given birth to twins; one red calf and a tan calf.

I put the cow and both calves in a pen by themselves. The tan one went right in to the cow's udder for a drink but the mother kicked it away. She tried again and again and was unsuccessful each time at getting a drink of that all-important first milk – colostrum. A newborn calf needs colostrum as it gives the calf protection against diseases. I locked the cow in a self-locking manger headgate and even with me helping the calf get a drink, the nasty cow would not allow it.

Looking for a mother

Leaving the threesome alone for an hour didn't help. The cow would not go near the calf. The calf was as bold as could be trying to find a new mom in the herd and was always kicked at and head-butted away by the cows.

I gave her three different (needle) injections and named her "Tiger." She did well on milk replacer, didn't get scours, and at about six weeks old she wasn't hungry for the bottle and I suspected she had found a "mom." An older cow with one calf and lots of milk was nursing three calves, and I saw Tiger in there suckling away. Persistence pays off!



Charolais cow and calf.

A recent *Canadian Cattlemen/Calving Special* magazine had a similar story. A woman wrote: "One day, my husband was checking barns to see if we had new calves. He came upon one of our Charolais cows with a light coloured calf. Off to the side was a new-born black calf that was all by itself. He went around checking our Black Angus cows to see if any one of them had calved but couldn't seem to find its mother. After a while, we realized our Charolais cow had been bred by our Angus bull and she had had a set of twins. The one heifer calf was light grey and the bull calf was all black. The mother wouldn't accept the little bull so I bottle fed it and took care of it until it was ready to be weaned. Always some surprises at calving time."

Beef farming can be frustrating, but it's also very rewarding watching those calves grow and fatten up. And, of course, full of surprises.

Meindert vander Galien is a Renfrew-area farmer. His cows calve in the spring and first calf heifers calve in the fall. He has year-old steers (castrated bulls) on feed, young bulls and heifers from last fall's calving crop, and a new crop of calves with their mothers.

Classifieds

Birthdays

Happy 90th Birthday

Maria Kuntz

June 11, 2012

We honour and bless our mom and oma for the gift she has been and continues to be.

With love from:
Evelyn and Syd Hielema
Joya
Justin and Kayla
Adrian

Address: Maria (and Jacob) Kuntz
KT 1501 – 35 Kingknoll Dr.
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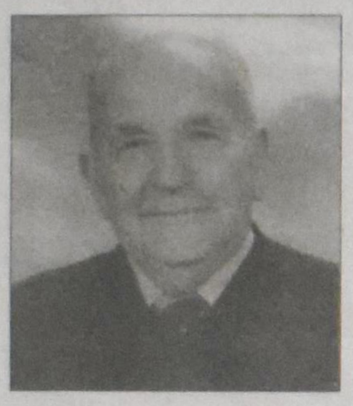

Harm DeVries

Give thanks to the LORD for he is good - his Love endures forever. Psalm 107:1

With praise and thanksgiving to our faithful and loving God, we hope to celebrate the **90th birthday** of our father, grandfather and great-grandfather on **June 20,2012**.

Thank you, Dad, for the steady influence and wonderful example you have been to all of us through the many years that the Lord has given you to us.

Bob and Trudy DeVries – Glen Williams, Ont.
Marvin and Peggy Devries – Mount Brydges, Ont.
Harry and Mary DeVries – Ancaster, Ont.
Joyce and Eduard VanVeenendaal – Ladner, B.C.

(12 grandchildren and I 5 great-grandchildren)

We will celebrate with an **open house** on Saturday, June 30,2012 at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ont. (Harmony Hall) from 2 - 4 p.m.
Best wishes only.

Obituaries

Jacob "Jake" Feenstra

of Woodstock went to be with the Lord on Monday May 21, 2012 in his 89th year.

Beloved husband of Jansjes "Jean" (nee DeWit) Feenstra for over 61 years.

Dear father of
Peter C. Feenstra of Woodstock
Neil Feenstra of Woodstock
Patricia Rood (John) of Innerkip
Marie Schneider (James) of Woodstock.

Loved grandfather of Gerrie Rood (Charlene), Linda Mijnders (Will), Robert Rood and Lisa Rood, Darrel Schneider, Nico Schneider, Anna Schneider and great-grandfather of Karly, Breanna, Valerie, Levi, Dayna and Avery.

Dear brother to Ate Feenstra, Akke Hellinga (Gabe), Bouwe Feenstra (Anna) all of Holland and brother-in-law to Mary Feenstra of London, Janie VanTol, Jan Post all of Holland, Gerrit (Mien) DeWit of Woodstock and Wim Vandermey of Fonthill.

Predeceased by his parents Peter and Peterja Feenstra, brother Hans Feenstra and Henry Feenstra and by several bothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

Jake was a co-founder of John Knox Christian School and a longtime member of Emmanuel Reformed Church.

A funeral service was held at Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock. If desired, memorial contributions to Canadian Diabetes Association or the Word and Deed Fund would be appreciated.

Online condolences at **brockandvisser.com**

Grace Geerts-Meester
1923-2012

After a full life of 89 years, our Mom passed away at Shalom Manor, Grimsby on May 15, 2012.

We will always remember her for her passion for family, her heart for helping others, and her trust in her Lord and Saviour. Mom was predeceased by our Dad, George, in 1986 and stepfather George Geerts in 2008.

We, her children, will greatly miss her:
Terri and Bob Busch
Theo and Alma Meester
Harry and Hessy Meester

Oma was much loved by her grandchildren Bob and Lisa Barlow-Busch, David Busch, Ryan and Debbi Meester, Kevin and Stacey Meester, Erin Meester, Laura and Adam Grenon, Derek and Erin Meester, Daniel Meester and Allison Stark, and eight great-grandchildren. Mom is also lovingly remembered by her stepchildren Bill and Dini Geerts, Herman and Margaret Geerts, Nancy and Vic VanderMolen, John and Linda Geerts, Corry and Richard Kloet, and their families, as well as her twin brothers Henry Yntema (Kingston) and Piet Yntema (Netherlands).

A memorial service was held at Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton on Saturday, May 19th, officiated by Rev. Fred VanderBerg. We are so thankful for the wonderful care mom received at Shalom Manor in the year and a half that she lived there.

Correspondence: T. Meester, 3754 Walker Rd, Beamsville ON L0R 1B2

Alice De Pater (nee Teunissen)

Jan. 14, 1925 — Ermelo, NL
May 8, 2012 — Morrisburg, Ont.

After 87 years, God called Alice home to her Lord and Saviour.

Lovingly remembered by John, her husband of 63 years.
Loving mother of Margo (Jack), Bea (Renny), Jan (Elizabeth), Alice (Dean), James (Barb), Stephen (Sue).
Precious oma and great-oma to 24 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren.

If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us from here.
Exodus 33:15

These words from their wedding text served as a guide throughout their married life and now provide words of comfort.

Correspondence: Rev. John De Pater
Hartford Retirement Centre
210 - 3 Fifth Street W.,
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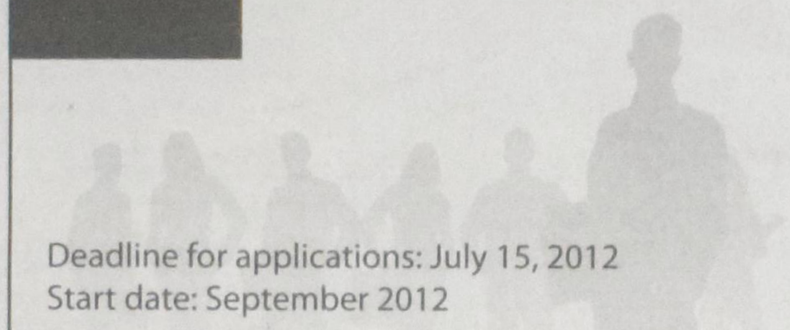

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http://themeadowsofaurora.com

Send Membership Application and Dues to:
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23 Tomlin Crescent
Richmond Hill ON L4C 7T4
905-884-6650

Job ads recently run in CC are posted on our website:
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The Holland Christian Male Choir to visit Ontario

On September 15th, some 116 musicians, choir members and their partners will leave Schiphol for their flight to Toronto. They would like to meet a lot of Canadian people during their two week long concert tour in Ontario from their first concert on September 18 at **Redeemer University** in Ancaster to the last instrumental concert in the **Cephan Christian Reformed Church** in Peterborough almost two weeks later on 27th of September.
They will be accompanied by Freddy Veldkamp as Director. Freddy is well-known from Dutch television. He has been on tour in Europe and Canada as a Director with various choirs (***Mannenkoor't Vechtdal from Hardenberg – Hervormd Mannenkoor IJsselmuiden/Grafhorst – Rijssens Mannenkoor – Mannenkoor Looft Den Heer from Vaassen)*** for a number of times. The organist of the Choir is Harm Hoeve, also a well-known from Dutch television. As Director of several choirs like ***Stereo Genemuiden*** and ***Het Groot Nederlands Jeugdkoor,*** he also made several trips to Canada and the USA with these choirs.
Last, but not least, Noortje van Middelkoop will accompany the Choir. She is a very famous panflute player and performed in concerts all over Europe but also in Canada and the United States. She is also well known from Dutch television and recorded several albums. There will be various concerts. The Choir will have concerts with Freddy Veldkamp, Harm Hoeve and Noortje van Middelkoop, but Harm and Noortje will do four Instrumental Concerts on organ and panflute as well. Don't miss it!
You will thoroughly enjoy these concerts in which a number of familiar Ontario choirs, ***Musica Sacra Chorus; the Liberation Choir*** and the ***Ottawa Carleton Male Choir*** will participate. If you want to hear and meet the ***Holland Christian Male Choir*** and musicians Freddy Veldkamp, Harm Hoeve and Noortje van Middelkoop, or enjoy Instrumental Concerts, plan for the concert(s) you would like to attend. You will not be disappointed.

Please visit: **dutchcommunitycalendar.ca**
More information at:
www.hollandchristianmalechoir.com
More details in July issue.

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Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 6 Hollandse Dag 10 am at First CRC, 310 Kingscourt Ave., **Kingston**, Ont. Speaker: Rev John Klomps. For more info call 613-546-5615.

June 8–9 Immanuel Christian Schools of **Lethbridge**, Alberta, will celebrate 50 years of God's goodness. For more information, please call the business office at (403) 327-4233 or visit our website at www.immanuelchristian.org

June 13 Hollandse Dag, Moorefield Community Centre. See ad May 28 issue.

June 17 Mountainview CRC **Grimsby**, will celebrate 50 years. Services will be held on Sunday at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. For more information, please contact the church office @ 905-945-0004 or email office@mountainviewcrc.org

June 24 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching. DVDs are available.

July 2 Frisian picnic starting 11 a.m. at Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area, Paris, Ont. on Highway 24A. Contact: tjbergy@hotmail.com.

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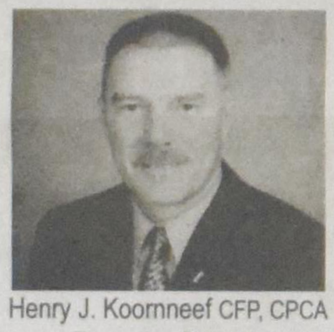

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Whose hands? P. 11 answers.
1. Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge 2. Nelson Mandela 3. *Praying Hands* by Albrecht Dürer 4. Mother Teresa 5. President Obama 6. Queen Beatrix

News

Baseball and faith

Christian Bell

Hanging on a wall in the Baseball Hall of Fame is a small plaque on which is written a homily on the Sermon on the Mount. It tells of an incident between Jackie Robinson, the first black man to play for a Major League team, and the team's owner, Branch Rickey: "Gently, Rickey slapped him. And Robinson understood, responding that he knew there would be times when he would have to turn the other cheek and not fight back."

Robinson, as it happens, did fight back – with an on-field performance that earned him awards for Rookie of the Year, Most Valuable Player, and an induction to the Hall of Fame. Nothing underscores a sermon quite like a good illustration.

It should not come as a surprise that anything so intrinsically American as baseball would be imprinted with Protestant allegory. Stanley Hauerwas goes so far as to write in *The Faith of Fifty Million: Baseball, Religion, and American Culture* that "baseball is the outworking of the liberal Protestant hope for the kingdom of God to be realized in America."

This may sound absurd; when we think of "the outworking of Protestant hope for the kingdom of God," we think of building universities or hospitals, not baseball teams. But Rickey, a devout Christian who desegregated Major League Baseball seven years before the Supreme Court desegregated public schools, might have argued otherwise.

Baseball has been called an American civil religion, and it certainly has all the trappings: The carefully structured liturgy of a nine-inning game, the seventh-inning hymn of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," even the exegetical commentary of the scorebooks.

Why does it matter that Christians should know anything about baseball? Because baseball is a game around and through which life, love, and loss are experienced intensely. If we agree on the importance of these things, it is worth our time to understand why they often find their locus in a four-corner ballpark.

To a Canadian audience, baseball might only be the curious obsession of a noisy next-door neighbor. But while baseball is resoundingly American in its origins and history, its appeal is hardly exclusive. Recall, for example, the Elysian dynasty of the early 1990s Toronto Blue Jays. Perhaps there are even a few *Québécois* who still follow the now-resurgent Washington Nationals. This is to say nothing of baseball's popularity in Japan, Latin America and elsewhere.

CHRISTIAN BELL

Baseball's religious characteristics, if it is even fair to call them such, do come out uniquely in an American context, however. Creation, fall, and redemption are annual dispensations at Fenway Park in Boston. Anybody who's been to Chicago knows the unfulfilled messianic hopes of Cubs fans. And where else in the world is total depravity more evident than Yankee Stadium?

Jackie Robinson signing major league contract with Rickey, 1948.

Coming together

This curious game; so fastidious in its geometry and statistics, so epicurean in its green grass and summer sunshine. Yet its most strikingly religious characteristic is pan-national: The way in which people are drawn together across bridges of prejudice and estrangement for the love of a game.

Marilynne Robinson draws on this in her 2008 novel *Home*, writing of the protagonist Glory Boughton and her estranged brother Jack: "When her brothers were at home, even Jack would play baseball. That may have been why they were all so taken up with it. Even Jack could be drawn into arguments about records and statistics. He would sit around the radio with the rest of them to listen to the games."

Such elusive common bonds demand our attention. How do we cultivate them? We exert so much effort in our churches to inorganically grow communities through outreach and evangelism. Baseball makes it look so easy: Put two teams of 25 men in a ballpark and people will drive from hundreds of miles away just to watch.

Perhaps we're overreaching. Despite our most effervescent hopes, we know we can't pack tens of thousands of people into a church 162 times a year. But if we have the humility to put a cultural horse before our cart on occasion, we can draw on baseball's wide appeal as a starting point for new conversations with the people around us.

I know nothing about the person in the Detroit Tigers hat who sat across from me on the bus, not even their name. But from that team logo on their hat, I catch a glimpse of an unguarded side of their personality – the emotions and enjoyments they experience watching a baseball game. Together separately, we watch the same game – *has a no-hitter going as we start the ninth inning!* – cheer the same hits – *hooks a two-run double down the left field line!* – and feel the same anxieties – *a bases loaded two-out jam ... and here comes the 3-2 pitch!*

Which is to say it's far easier to approach a stranger and strike up a conversation about yesterday's baseball game than it is to ask if they've ever heard about Jesus. This embarrasses us, and it should, but it is human nature.

Energy and emotion

Similarly, it is human nature that pours so much energy and emotion into a game whose consequences for our lives are cosmically incidental. My wife and I have been to five baseball games in the past two weeks – not an unusual pace for us. In just those past five games, we've seen three marriage proposals, numerous anniversary celebrations, alumni gatherings and so much more.

It is not incidental that these events take place around the game. The context of baseball is where so many of these relationships began, were fostered, or can recall an especially memorable occasion. Don't we think of church the same way? Worship, like the game, is ostensibly the focus, but so much life happens on the periphery.

Often the atmosphere of the ballpark is jubilant and playful – turning somber when the home team slips behind and becoming raucous again when the come-from-behind run crosses the plate. One person leaves full of joy and energy, while another leaves disappointed and confused. Somebody leaves the crowd and returns to their lonely isolation, while another lingers behind to continue talking with a new friend. This emotional intensity is as natural to a baseball game as it is to a church service. Perhaps there is some common ground between the two, even if it is not the full "outworking of Protestant hope" that Hauerwas suggests.

These glimpses of humanity we see in baseball – the losses, the joys, and the hopes – are the same glimpses we see in our faith. The way people are drawn together around a game suggests an attraction we might aspire to emulate. Even if the ultimate end is nothing more than the shared enjoyment of a game well played, to know something of baseball is to know something of our God-given human nature.

Christian Bell is a web designer for a non-profit organization and a graduate from Calvin Theological Seminary. He and his wife Beth live in Grand Rapids, Mich.